

►Vekoma's The Flash: Vertical Velocity delivers high-speed thrills, smiles — pages 9-10

Amusement TODAY

June 2025
Vol. 29
Issue 3

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It is Epic! Universal's most ambitious theme park yet opens

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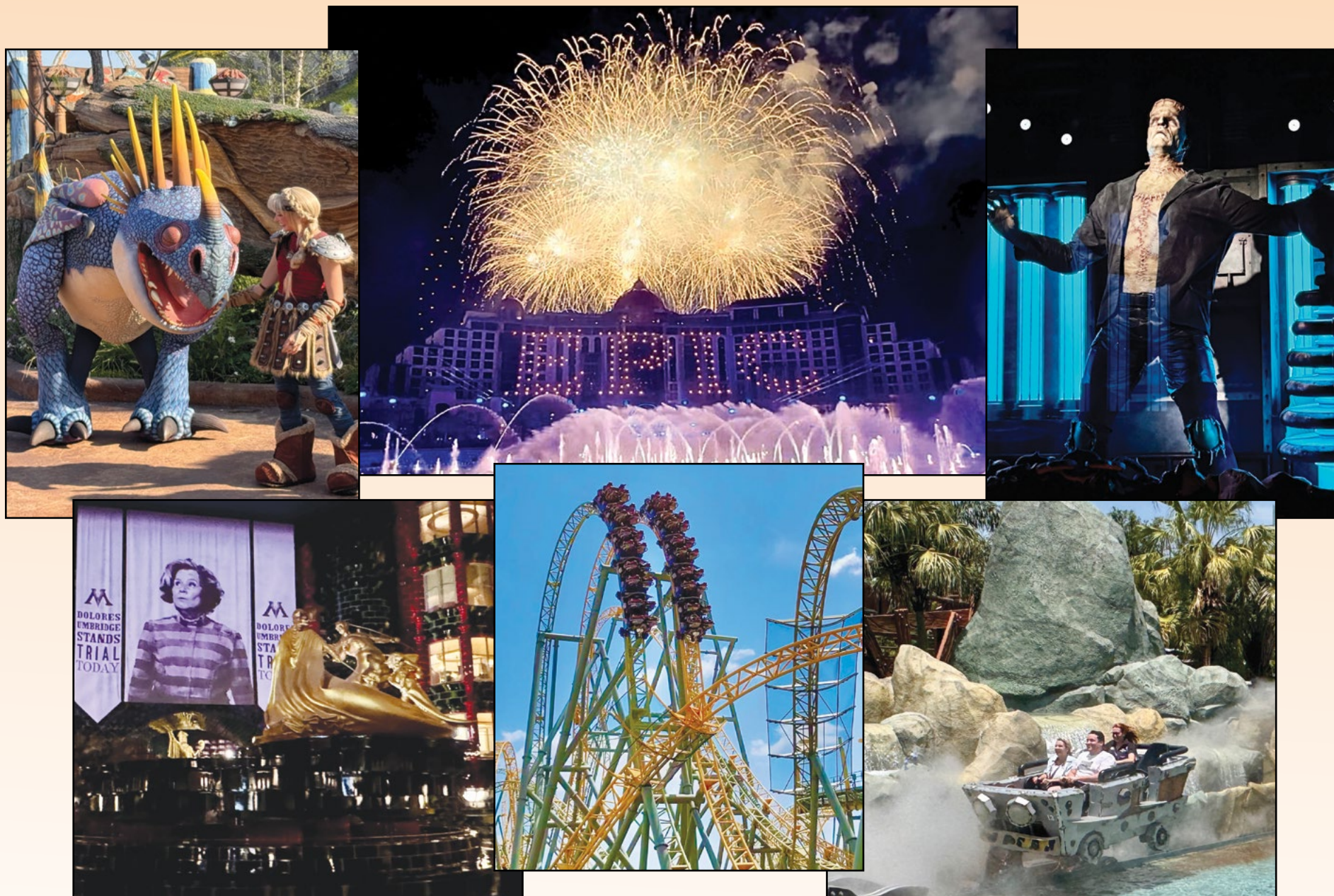
ORLANDO — **Universal Orlando Resort** has upped the ante on the theme park game yet again. With the grand opening of the \$7billion, 110-acre **Universal Epic Universe** — on May 22 — Universal has not only opened its fourth gate but also solidified its standing as

a premier, week-long resort destination and industry innovator. Ten years in the making, this monumental expansion introduces guests to five intricately themed realms, cutting-edge attractions and unprecedented immersive storytelling — each a portal like no other.

However, it was just over five years ago that the journey to Universal Epic Universe was

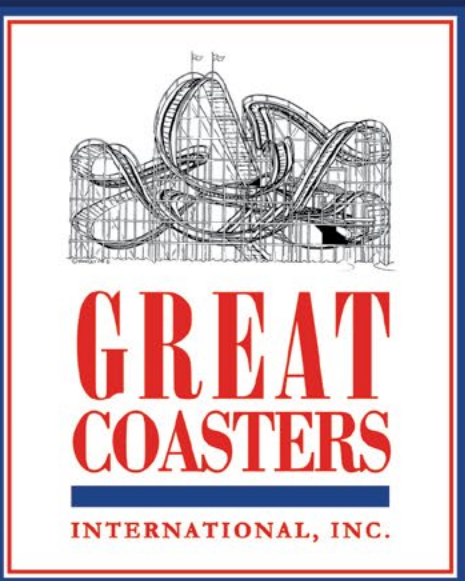
derailed when the project was entirely canceled during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite initial ground clearing already being underway. Yet, in 2021, the dream was resurrected. Universal's team returned to work with renewed energy and purpose, determined to

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Epic Universe has arrived! Dragon encounters in How to Train Your Dragon – Isle of Berk (top left); a spellbinding, mind-bending journey through The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Ministry of Magic (bottom left); frighteningly fun monster mayhem in Dark Universe (top right); pixel-perfect thrills in Super Nintendo World and Donkey Kong Country (bottom right) and gravity-defying coasters in Celestial Park (bottom middle) deliver a truly 'Epic' new adventure. AT/DAVID FAKE

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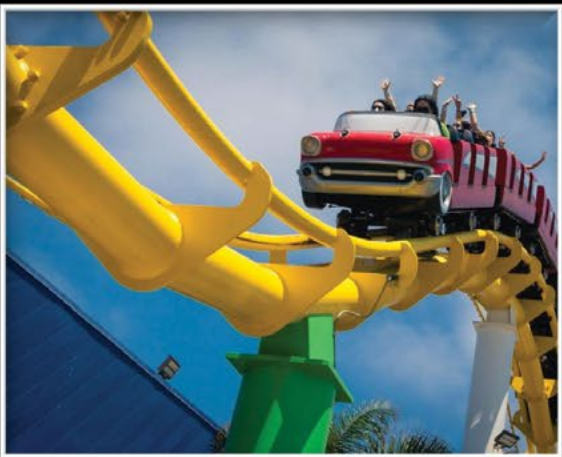


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AT NOTEBOOK: John W.C. Robinson, jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

The monsters are alive!


Robinson

Remember the Bookmobile? That giant panel van that was a rolling library on wheels? As a young kid, always thumbing through the books on board, I was ecstatic to discover books loaded with pictures and details about the movie monsters I'd seen on the afternoon flicks from my local TV station at my grandmother's house.

Godzilla, Frankenstein's monster, *The Creature From The Black Lagoon* and more were there for me to discover more about. They were larger-than-life characters that seemed real and sent my imagination running wild.

Over the years, my love for the dark universe of creatures of the night has only heightened. Yes, there are Halloween haunts and horror movies to feed that passion, but I've never been able to immerse myself in the fun world of monsters from my childhood.

I even remember being both disappointed — yet making the best of it — when I first visited Universal Studios Florida and the only monster fun that could be had was the Monsters Cafe just across from the former Ghostbusters attraction. I remember singing along and being in seventh heaven in my 20s upon discovering "Beetlejuice's Graveyard Review" with those classic monsters taking center stage as rock stars. It was fun, energetic and the kind of thing my imagination had created from time to time. (I still say, Michael Bolton's got nothing on Frankenstein's monster belting out "When A Man Loves A Woman" to The Bride herself.)

Now, more than a century since Universal Pictures first released *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Universal's Epic Universe is here with an entire land dedicated to the classics of Universal's monster universe. Frankenstein's Castle towers over all and the misunderstood minions of the night come to life!

Of all of the new areas at Epic Universe, the others seem to be grabbing the headlines. But that's okay. The rest of the world can be eager with anticipation for more Harry Potter, a full-on Nintendo world in the U.S. and modern kids-fair such as *How To Train Your Dragon*. As for me, I'll be howling like a werewolf with the glee of Dracula at sunset as I step through an Epic Universe portal to scream "They're ALIVE! ALIVE!!"

FLINT'S VIEW: Bubba Flint

INDUSTRY VOICE: Craig Laurie, RWS Global

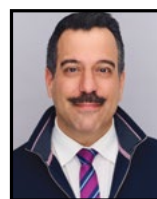
How to create "FOMO" in the entertainment industry

I'm often asked how to create FOMO — the fear of missing out. I believe the most spectacular ideas can fall flat if no one knows they exist. That's why an experience is only as powerful as the marketing behind it.

At RWS Global, I'm proud to lead some of the most talented creatives in the industry. I implore them with a core principle when creating our experiences: audience engagement. Concurrently, from the first brainstorm to opening day, we partner with our marketing team to ensure each moment created is positioned to spark excitement, connection and action to the audiences.

I encourage the team throughout their creative development to view the moments through a social media lens. Our goal is to make sharing effortless. Our experiences are filled with ready-to-share visuals, layered storytelling and moments built for social media.

In today's world, a moment isn't real until


Laurie

it's posted. People want to feel and be part of something. When they see others experiencing joy, they want in. That's the essence of FOMO.

We also work with clients to extend impact. To help shape strategies that create urgency and maximize ROI, we suggest integrating elements and strategies such as F&B offerings, VIP exclusive experiences and more. Sizzle reels, engaging visuals and high-impact social campaigns are as critical to success as any script or set piece.

As exclusive live experience partners to our clients, we design vibrant, immersive spaces and experiences that fuel brand loyalty. The creative drives the content of each experience, which drives the posts that drive attendance. It's all part of a carefully crafted journey.

When creativity and marketing work together, the result is more than a great moment. It becomes a movement. This is how I believe we create FOMO for the masses.

Opinions expressed on this page are those of the columnist(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.



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Amusement Today is an independent, privately-owned trade news-based publication for the greater amusement, theme and water parks industries, published by Amusement Today, Inc., P.O. Box 5427, Arlington, Texas 76005. Amusement Today publishes 14 issues per year (distributed digitally); EXTRA! EXTRA! Desktop Edition (daily digital news); Amusement Today.com (information based website) and posts as needed on social media platforms. Amusement Today, Inc. conducts an industry survey, with numerous categories, and releases results during the awards ceremony and on GoldenTicketAwards.com (website for Golden Ticket Awards).

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2 MINUTE DRILL



AT: Tim Baldwin

Julie Freed, Lagoon

Julie Freed quite literally grew up at an amusement park. As part of the Freed family, owners of **Lagoon**, her first job was at the park at the age of 9. Although she majored in health at **Arizona State University**, the amusement industry is really her calling. As director of special events, she gets to create unique and memorable experiences for Lagoon's guests. Her coworkers consider her an enthusiastic supporter of their efforts in the park, and Freed is known for her fabulous sartorial flair and her loyal companion **Mossi**, a large black poodle with a distinctive red mohawk.

Title: Director of Special Events

Number of years in the industry: 21

Best thing about the industry: I am proud of the fact that the amusement industry fosters an incredible safety-first culture. When people I ask what I do, I tell them that I am in the business of safety. Then I get to the bit about fun a little later.

Favorite amusement ride: Primordial! Perhaps I am biased...

If I weren't working in the amusement industry, I would be... Exploring the entertainment and fashion industries, clearly.

Biggest challenge facing our industry: Guest misconduct and the safety implications that go along with it.

The thing I like most about amusement/water park season is: Especially in Utah, when Lagoon opens for the season, everyone here is thrilled to get outside and enjoy the nice sunshine and longer days.

Best topping on a funnel cake: Savory Thai Chicken

In a single word, my style is: Loud.

My first time out of the country was ... a nice trip to Mexico with my family.

Which decade defines your preference in music? Who didn't love the '90s?

My current streaming obsession is ... *The Four Seasons*.

The silliest thing in my office is ... I just counted *eight* different colored Lagoon fanny packs in my office.

Would you pick a day completely to yourself or a house full of company? The more the merrier at my house.



Julie Freed has been working in the amusement industry since the young age of 9. Now, she is Lagoon's director of special events. COURTESY LAGOON

A typical summer Sunday with your family would be: Taking my two-year-old son to Lagoon first thing in the morning so that he can ride his favorite ride, Bulgy the Whale, over and over and over again. Afterward, we typically end the day with a little bike ride to Grandpa Davey and Lulu's house.

Pick one: Swimming or Biking? Biking is life.

My favorite National Park in Utah is ... Zion National Park

The most I've ever spent on a piece of jewelry is ... Fortunately, my very gracious father, Dave, gave me jewelry gifts for my birthday all of my life. Now that he has passed, I feel like I am carrying a piece of him with me whenever I wear it.

The person at work I am most jealous of is ... Terry Capener. Have you ever met someone more famous than Terry?

Personal favorite ride at Lagoon from your childhood: I will never forget riding the Sky Coaster for the first time with my father. It is still one of my favorite rides because of the nostalgia.

The hardest thing for me to get rid of is: Flattened, emptied plush from the park that my incredibly persistent dog, Mossimo, has decided belongs to no one but *him*.

Children at the park always make me smile when ... They conquer their fear of riding a new ride. It's simply the greatest thing to witness every day.

THE INDUSTRY SEEN

Floating high for the 50th



RUST, Germany — Europa-Park hosts an annual balloon festival. For 2025, Jeffrey Seifert and Tim Baldwin from *Amusement Today* (pictured with Europa-Park founder Roland Mack, far left) were asked to join others in taking the inaugural ride of the resort's brand-new balloon honoring its 50th anniversary. The happy passengers took off from the Europa-Park resort and flew over the German countryside at more than 4,000 feet. The balloon was adorned with the park's mascots, Ed and Edda, on one side and the 50th logo on the other. AT/TIM BALDWIN

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►EPIC

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deliver an experience worthy of the name “Epic.”

“Epic Universe is the culmination of what we’ve been working on for nearly a decade. Our teams have poured so much passion, vision and dedication into this new park, and there is truly nothing like it in our universe,” said **Karen Irwin**, president and COO of Universal Orlando Resort at a media event at the stunning **Universal Helios Grand Hotel**.

The hotel, a 500-room Mediterranean-inspired retreat, is anchored to Universal Epic Universe. Guests of the hotel enjoy exclusive access via a private entrance, spectacular views of the park, and amenities including Bar Helios, rooftop dining, and Helios-themed kids’ suites. Together with the upcoming **Universal Stella Nova and Terra Luna Resorts**, Universal now operates 11 hotels and over 11,000 rooms resort-wide.

Mark Woodbury, chairman and CEO of **Universal Destinations & Experiences**, declared as he stood before media guests at the Helios Grand Hotel, “What you’re going to see and feel and taste and experience is really the culmination of a 10-year journey. It’s unlike anything you will experience.”

Day guests begin that full sensory experience by entering Universal Epic Universe through the striking Chronos portal, a swirling gyroscopic structure manufactured by **Zamperla**, symbolizing the moment time and space dissolve into adventure. From there, they are transported to



the central hub, Celestial Park, a turn-of-the-century exposition-themed land inspired by world’s fairs and astronomical mythology. As **Steve Tatham**, executive creative director, put it, “Celestial Park is about exploration, optimism and putting the ‘park’ back in theme park.”

Celestial Park boasts more than lush gardens and reflective pools. It is home to the visually arresting **Stardust Racers**, a spectacular dual-track launch coaster featuring a mid-course top hat and the now-iconic “Celestial Spin” crossover element. Clocking speeds up to 62 mph across 5,000 feet of track, the racing coaster features trains named **Velox** and **Lumen** — piloted by stylized “Stardust Goddesses” — and was designed by **Universal Creative** in collaboration with **RMC** and manufactured by **Mack Rides**.

“Stardust Racers is our love letter to coaster enthusiasts,” said **Gina Scheraldi**, show producer for Celestial Park. “It’s intense, smooth and looks spectacular both day and night. If you haven’t ridden it after dark, you haven’t truly ridden it.”

Celestial Park is also home to **Constellation Carousel**, an omnidirectional carousel powered by massive servo motors, and **Astronomica**, an



Stardust Racers — designed by Universal Creative in collaboration with RMC and manufactured by Mack Rides — is Universal’s love letter to coaster enthusiasts (above). **Hiccup’s Wing Gliders** (below) is a family thrill coaster by Intamin that reaches 45 mph. AT/DAVID FAKE, GARY SLADE

interactive water feature that doubles as a compass rose.

Dining highlights include **Atlantic**, a full-service seafood restaurant built into a Victorian-style aquarium, and **The Blue Dragon Pan-Asian Restaurant**. Guests looking for a more casual option rave about **Pizza Moon**, serving up whimsical pies with an interstellar twist.

From Celestial Park, guests traverse uniquely designed portals to four additional realms. Each land is a fully realized environment with distinct architecture, cuisine, retail, and — most critically — deeply integrated storytelling. Throughout the entire park, cutting-edge lighting and environmental control technology allow each world to transform at night. Thousands of programmable LEDs, fiber optics, and projection mapping systems are synchronized to create a dynamic day-to-night evolution unique to each



realm. Complementing this is a bespoke soundtrack for every land, with compositions and audio design specifically tailored to reinforce the tone, setting and emotion of each environment.

First stop: How to Train Your Dragon – Isle of Berk. Set after the second film in **DreamWorks’** beloved trilogy, Berk is a kinetic landscape of Viking buildings and dragon perches. The standout ride, **Hiccup’s Wing Gliders**, is a family thrill coaster by **Intamin** that reaches 45 mph as it swoops over the park’s

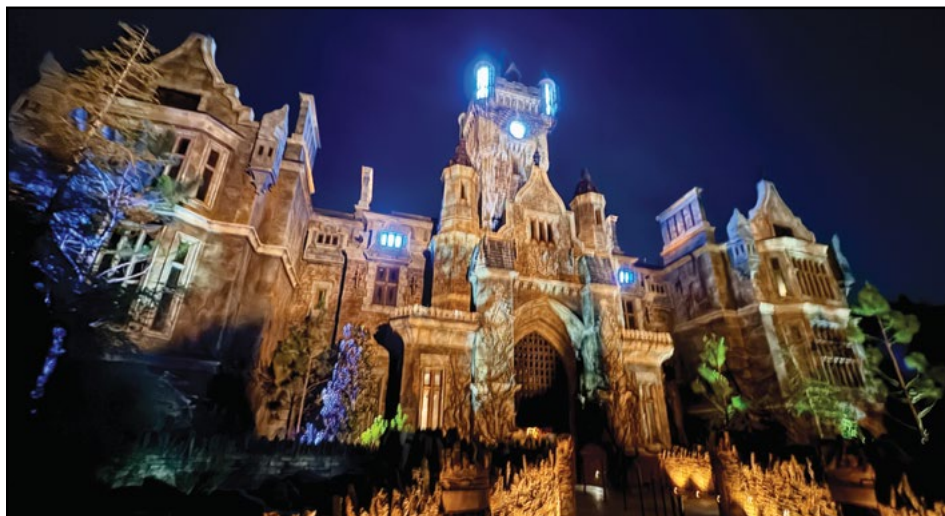
lagoon. Meanwhile, **Dragon Racer’s Rally**, a custom dual **Gerstlauer Sky Fly**, lets guests control the spin and thrill level of their dragon-rider gondolas, rising to heights of 67 feet on two “Viking-made” dragon-riding trainers.

The live show **The Untrainable Dragon** — a reimagined adaptation of the Universal Beijing hit — delivers emotionally resonant storytelling with life-sized flying dragon puppets and award-winning set design. “Toothless’

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Celestial Park is also home to the omnidirectional **Constellation Carousel** (above left). The land is anchored by the **Chronos** portal entrance, as well as **Astronomica**, an interactive water feature that doubles as a compass rose (above middle). Located in the **How to Train Your Dragon – Isle of Berk** land, **Dragon Racer’s Rally** is a custom dual **Gerstlauer Sky Fly** that lifts riders up to 67 feet into the air (above right). AT/DAVID FAKE, GARY SLADE



Housed within the facade of Frankenstein Manor in the village of Darkmoor (above left), **Monsters Unchained: The Frankenstein Experiment** is a RoboCoaster-based dark ride that utilizes a KUKA robotic arm system. The live show “**The Untrainable Dragon**” delivers emotionally resonant storytelling with life-sized flying dragon puppets and award-winning set design (above right). AT/DAVID FAKE

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flight always brings tears to eyes,” said Senior Show Producer **Catherine Digenova**. “It’s pure magic in motion.”

The most buzzed-about treat in Berk? Mac and cheese bread cones served at Hooligan’s Grog & Gruel. A Viking-sized comfort food hit, these cones are quickly becoming the land’s signature snack.

Guests craving high-tech wonder will be drawn to Super Nintendo World, which includes Super Mario Land and the U.S. debut of Donkey Kong Country. Developed in collaboration with **Nintendo**, the land features Mario Kart: Bowser’s Challenge, an AR-based interactive dark ride with engineering and restraints supplied by **ART Engineering**; Yoshi’s Adventure, a family omnimover by **Sansei Technologies** with panoramic views; and Mine-Cart Madness, a groundbreaking coaster constructed by general contractor **JR Automation** (through its acquisition of **Setpoint**) — featuring track supplied by **Intermountain Lift** as well as engineering and restraints from ART Engineering — designed to appear as if riders leap over track gaps using a unique sideways motion mechanism.

Retail and dining in Super Nintendo World mirror the games’ whimsy: guests can eat at Toadstool Cafe, snack at Yoshi’s Snack Island or try themed food like the Mario Burger and Bowser’s Fireball Challenge. In Donkey Kong Country, the new favorite is the DK Crush Float from The Bubbly Barrel — a frosty, tropical blend of

pineapple soda and banana soft-serve, topped with a chocolate medallion bearing Donkey Kong’s signature initials. Power-Up Bands, wearable tech devices, allow guests to interact with the land and compete in virtual challenges across both Mario and Donkey Kong zones.

The darkheart of Universal Epic Universe beats strongest in Dark Universe, a fog-laden Gothic village where horror classics are reborn. **Monsters Unchained: The Frankenstein Experiment**, a RoboCoaster-based dark ride that utilizes a KUKA robotic arm system, like the one used in Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey at **Universal’s Islands of Adventure**.

The ride features some of the most advanced animated figures ever built, including a nine-foot-tall, walking Frankenstein’s Monster. “This is Universal’s most terrifying attraction ever,” said Creative Executive **Chris Frisella**. “And **Danny Elfman**’s score gives it operatic weight.”

Also featured in Dark Universe is Curse of the Werewolf, a family spinning coaster from Mack

Rides, and the immersive Darkmoor Monster Makeup Experience. Retail spots like Pretorius’ Scientific Oddities and themed eateries such as Das Stakehaus and The Burning Blade Tavern round out the frightful fun.

The resurgence of Universal monsters in popular culture plays perfectly into this new realm. These legendary creatures — Dracula, The Mummy, The Wolf Man, The Creature from the Black Lagoon and Frankenstein’s Monster — were the saving grace of Universal Studios during the Great Depression. The monsters helped keep the studio doors open at a time when Hollywood was in dire straits. Their cultural legacy, both eerie and iconic, is now honored with a fresh and deeply immersive perspective in Dark Universe, blending legacy and innovation in ways never seen before.

Finally, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter — Ministry of Magic combines 1920s Paris from *Fantastic Beasts* with the iconic British Ministry from the Harry Potter film franchise. The signature attraction, Harry Potter

and the Battle at the Ministry, is a next-gen ride featuring an omnidirectional lift system that sends guests careening across the atrium and through magical departments in pursuit of Dolores Umbridge.

The revolutionary ride system created by **Simtec Systems** utilizes groundbreaking, omnidirectional lifts that maneuver an elevator-like vehicle holding up to 14 guests seamlessly in multiple directions (up, down, forward, backward, sideways and more) to create a thrilling and immersive experience truly unlike anything seen in the industry before now.

The land also includes Le Cirque Arcanus, a live theatrical show featuring puppetry, aerialists and creatures from Newt Scamander’s menagerie. Retail includes Cosme Acajor Baguettes Magique wand shop and Les Galeries Mirifiques, while guests can dine on quiche and Butterbeer crepes at Café L’Air De La Sirène — a delectable twist on a beloved beverage that’s already gaining cult status.

To close Universal Epic Universe’s opening celebration, both Woodbury and

Steven Spielberg, the latter serving as a creative consultant on the project, gave narration to the park’s emotional opening celebration spectacular finale — a breathtaking crescendo of light, fountains, fireworks and music that echoed through the night sky and into industry history.

As the fireworks and fountains soared at the conclusion of the opening ceremony, drones simultaneously created a portal in the sky and spelled “EPIC” between Celestial Park and the Universal Helios Grand Hotel. Media, VIPs, industry professionals and fans alike stood in awe. Earlier in the day Tatham made a comment that that truly resonated in that moment. “This isn’t just a park,” he said. “It’s a statement.”

Universal Epic Universe is now officially open and expected to draw millions of guests annually. More than just a milestone in Universal’s history, it is a seismic shift in what’s possible in themed entertainment. A bold challenge to the status quo — and a beacon pointing toward the future.

•universalorlando.com



Dark Universe features a family spinning coaster from Mack Rides dubbed Curse of the Werewolf (above). A visit to Super Nintendo World immerses guests in a living Nintendo game (right). AT/GARY SLADE, DAVID FAKE



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The Flash: Vertical Velocity speeds into Six Flags Great Adventure

AT: B. Derek Shaw

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JACKSON, N.J. — The first super boomerang roller coaster in North America began operation in late March at **Six Flags Great Adventure**. Inspired by The Flash, a superhero known for his incredible speed, The Flash: Vertical Velocity is engineered to give riders the sensation of racing through the air at lightning-fast speeds. It is manufactured by **Vekoma Rides, BV**.

Located in the Metropolis section of the park near the main gate, the 45-second ride is a launched shuttle-style coaster that uses linear synchronous motors (LSMs) to accelerate the six-car, 24-passenger train. The launch goes back and forth teasing riders about what is to follow. After that, the train zooms forward catapulting passengers through the tight layout, with relentless speed, thrills and plenty of moments of excitement.



The spike is used in the initial launch. Once the ride goes through the course, it travels up the reverse spike, falling backward going through all the elements a second time. COURTESY SIX FLAGS GREAT ADVENTURE

Riders experience a series of elements, including a 180-degree twisted drop, vertical rollback, a three-second stalled Immelmann, an LSM boost and a corkscrew. Once riders ascend the tower

at the end of the layout, it is all done backward this time, ending on the other side of the shared reverse point spike before coasting into the station. All told, there are 10 moments of airtime during the ride experience.

"This high-energy ride delivers everything coaster fans are looking for — forward and backward launches, inversions and an adrenaline rush that even The Flash himself would approve of," said Park President **Brian Bacica**. "With its 48-inch height requirement, junior and experienced thrill seekers alike will have the chance to experience it firsthand."

Ryan Eldredge, regional

manager, public relations, described the overall timeline for the project. "The idea was first floated around 2021-2022, with concept development taking about a year. We then finalized the partnership with Vekoma, broke ground, and spent the following months on construction, theming and testing. It's been roughly a three-to-four-year journey from concept to opening day."

The Flash was originally scheduled to open in 2024.

"With projects of this scale, delays can happen for a variety of reasons — whether it's finalizing design details, coordinating logistics, or ensuring everything meets our quality and safety standards. Our top priority

was delivering the best possible experience, even if that meant taking a bit more time," explained Eldredge.

He then talked about bumps along the way. "Every major attraction has its share of hurdles — whether it's weather delays, technical adjustments, or coordinating multiple teams. But nothing we couldn't solve with a strong team and a clear vision. In fact, some of those challenges led to better design solutions in the end."

The park had a great experience with the manufacturer. "Working with Vekoma has been a fantastic experience," said

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From the entrance plaza, potential riders can get a glimpse of a portion of the various elements contained on the 1430-foot-long ride. COURTESY SIX FLAGS GREAT ADVENTURE



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The 45-second shuttle-style coaster goes through five different elements, then goes through them in reverse.
AT/B. DEREK SHAW

►FLASH
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Eldridge. “They bring not only technical expertise but also a collaborative spirit. Their attention to detail and willingness to innovate helped us push the boundaries of what this ride could be.”

The theming for this attraction is streamlined and minimal, however, it still sets the tone for the experience.

“We focused on key visual elements and environmental touches that complement the ride's story and atmosphere without overwhelming it. It's clean, effective and designed to enhance the overall ride without distracting from the thrill,” said Eldridge.

As it is a shuttle coaster, there is only one train which does increase guest wait time, especially on busy days.

Initial force can really be felt with front seat rides, as it creates the illusion of feeling faster. Backseat rides are more intense as there is more pull from the launches.

“We're incredibly proud of what we've created. This attraction represents the future of what we want to offer our guests: thrilling, immersive, story-driven experiences. We can't wait for more guests to ride it and make memories,” said Eldridge.

Parkgoers have positive marks for the 13th and newest coaster in the park, as Eldridge explained. “So far, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Guests are loving the thrilling dynamics of the ride. We've seen everything from cheers to people immediately getting back in line. It's been incredibly rewarding to see the emotional reactions.”

Vekoma's first super boomerang in the world opened as Cloud Shuttle at Fantawild Wonderland Jiangsu, China in July 2023.

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Length: 1,430 feet
•
Duration: 68 seconds
•
Maximum G-force: 4Gs
•
Footprint:
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Kings Dominion adds the winged thrills of Rapterra from B&M

AT: Pam Sherborne
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DOSWELL, Va. — Rapterra, a steel launched wing roller coaster at **Kings Dominion**, Doswell, Virginia, made its debut on opening day this year and guests are loving it. The park opened for an evening news preview on March 28 and then to the public on March 29.

Being touted as the world's tallest and longest launched wing roller coaster, the **Bolliger & Mabillard** Rapterra is 145 feet at its tallest, with a launch speed of 65 miles per hour. The track length is 3,086 feet with three inversions.

"Guests love that the ride offers a different experience based on where you sit, left wing versus right wing, front versus back an inside seat versus the outside seat," said **Geoff Zindren**, Six Flags regional manager, public relations. "The result is that Rapterra can be ridden many times and each ride is unique."

Plus, Zindren said, guests also are enjoying the theming around the ride.

"We're proud of the work we've done to create an



Kings Dominion's newest roller coaster, Rapterra, a steel launched wing coaster, made its debut to the public on March 29. AT/TIM BALDWIN

immersive experience," he said. "There's lots of decor in the station and the queue line and guests love finding little Easter eggs we've planted alongside nods to Kings Dominion's past as they go through the line."

Zindren said that Kings Dominion wanted to give guests a world-class, one-of-a-kind experience with its newest ride. So park officials went to Bolliger & Mabillard and worked with them to design the coaster for the space available and to heighten some of the unique energy in the Jungle

X-Pedition area of the park.

There were no special challenges during the construction of the coaster. The coaster is sitting on a site that has hosted several rides in the history of the park, most recently Volcano, The Blast Coaster.

"Construction was, to a small extent, an archaeological dig whereby we'd discover components of rides that used to be on the site," Zindren said. "Some of those pieces uncovered were as old as the park itself. It

was a lot of fun discovering these pieces as we went."

Rapterra's immersive backstory takes place centuries ago when ancient leaders built a shrine to honor the mighty Jungle Hawk. People who entered the shrine became spiritually linked and temporarily possessed the powers and abilities of the bird of prey.

Building the temple at the base of a volcano, Mt. Inferna proved unfortunate. The ground surrounding the magma chamber collapsed, burying the Jungle Hawk temple under mounds of volcanic rock. The temple seemingly vanished from the earth.

Archaeologists recently discovered the volcanic site and unearthed the remains of the Jungle Hawk shrine. The bird's spirit remains at the site, launching brave riders

FAST FACTS

Rapterra

Supplier:
Bolliger & Mabillard

Launch speed:
65 mph

Tallest point:
145 feet

Inversions:
Three
(Dive loop, flat spin corkscrew, 360° raptor roll)

Length:
3,086 feet

Duration:
89 seconds

Capacity:
Two trains,
20 guests per train,
1,140 guests per hour

to exhilarating new heights.

Bridgette Bywater, vice president and general manager of Kings Dominion, expressed excitement about the new addition.

"Rapterra is the perfect centerpiece for our 50th-anniversary celebration and promises to bring a captivating and exhilarating set of thrills to a brand-new generation of guests," Bywater said.

Kings Dominion now has 13 coasters operating on its 400-acre property.

• kingsdominion.com

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The ride features extensive and immersive theming with a backstory of an unearthed temple for the Jungle Hawk at the base of a volcano.

AT/TIM BALDWIN



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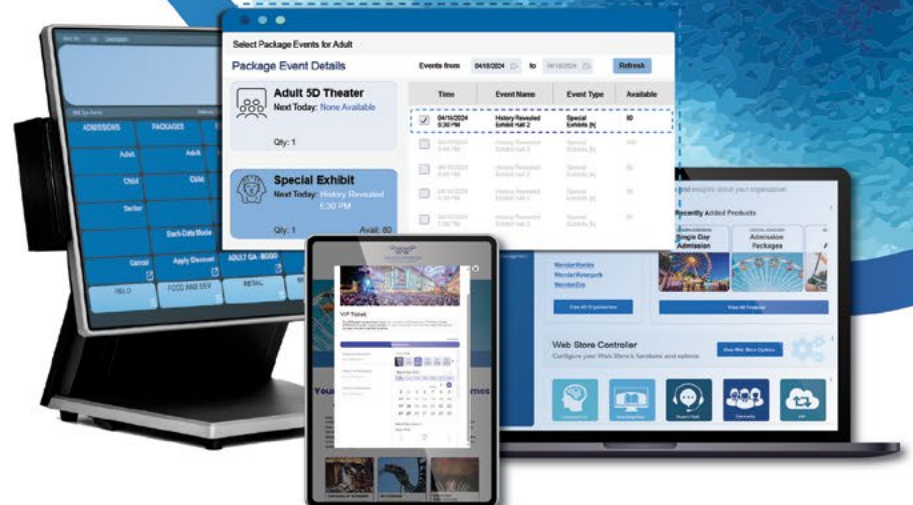
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Kentucky Kingdom debuts \$11 million Discovery Meadow expansion

AT: Tim Baldwin

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LOUISVILLE — When **Kentucky Kingdom** opened its gates on May 10, local fans experienced a beautiful transformation. While some new additions in theme parks focus on massive new rides, the Louisville theme park has a broader scope, one that will cater to all members of the family.

The name of the newly themed area is **Discovery Meadow**. At a price tag of \$11 million, it aims to check a lot of boxes. Rides are always a main draw, and **Discovery Meadow** adds three new ones. Also new is a shaded, 4,800-square-foot playground. Two eateries are being refreshed, two restrooms are being refurbished, and more shade overall will accent the new feel to the area.

“Our goal from day one was to create a space that celebrates the spirit of Kentucky while bringing families together through immersive, story-driven experiences,” said **Carly Uglow**, director of sales and marketing. “We weren’t just adding rides — we were building an environment. We asked ourselves: How can we make **Discovery Meadow** feel like a natural extension of both the park and the community? That mindset guided every decision, from the ride



Cumberland Express (above) is a new train ride for **Kentucky Kingdom’s Discovery Meadow** supplied by **Metallbau Emmeln**. **Scout’s Squirrel Race (below)** is one of two new rides from **Zamperla** in the new section. COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM

selection to the landscaping and character development. It’s not just a new land, it’s an invitation to explore, play and connect in a setting that feels uniquely local.”

One of the most critical ingredients to the transformation is the inclusion of gardens.

“The gardens are really the heartbeat of **Discovery Meadow**,” Uglow told *Amusement Today*. “They’re not just visual filler, they’re active, engaging spaces designed to slow guests down in the best way. They offer moments of pause, beauty and interactive fun. Whether you’re spotting local plants or resting under the shade, we wanted to reflect Kentucky’s natural charm while providing comfort and layered experiences beyond rides.”



Two of the three new rides are supplied by **Zamperla**. **Redbird Racer** is a **Flying Tigers** attraction themed to the state bird, the cardinal. **Scout’s Squirrel Race** provides an attraction to a new park mascot to the area, **Scout the Squirrel**.

“**Kentucky Kingdom** and **Herschend Family Entertainment** were fantastic partners on this project,” said **Ramon Rosario**, director of sales, **Zamperla**. “We have a long history working together, and **Zamperla** developed a great handle on the family-forward vision they have for their properties. For this project, they pushed us to create heavily themed versions of two classic **Zamperla** attractions — and the results were fantastic. They have a world-class design team, and our artists

turned **Herschend’s** vision into reality; that combination is what has led to a decades-long partnership. The desire for detailed theming in a regional theme park is what more clients are requesting, and **Zamperla’s** talented team is what sets us apart.”

The train ride, **Cumberland Express**, winds through the “wilderness,” where guests can see and hear animals within the landscape. It is manufactured by **Metallbau Emmeln**.

The shaded play area, **Happy Hollow**, allows even the youngest to burn off some energy. Within this environment, kids will find much to invite them to climb, crawl and balance.

“We created a 4,800-square-foot shaded playground that features both active and accessible

elements so kids of all ages and their caregivers can enjoy it together. It’s not just about running and climbing; it’s about shared moments,” Uglow told *AT*.

Many of the existing rides are being rethemed and renamed to better fit into **Discovery Meadow**. Two roller coasters are leaving storm themes behind to become **Woodland Run** and **Wind Chaser**. A family coaster is being renamed **Hollyhock and Roll**. In all, the reimagined area will feature 24 new or rethemed experiences.

“Renaming and re-theming gave us the opportunity to tie the entire land together under a single narrative thread,” said Uglow. “Each ride now feels like a chapter in the story of **Discovery Meadow**, whether it’s tied to native wildlife, the landscape or the overall spirit of **Kentucky**. It also gave us a chance to refresh these attractions in ways that feel intentional rather than piecemeal. Cohesion was key and we wanted guests to feel like they’d stepped into a world, not just walked into a new section of the park.”

“**Discovery Meadow** is the most exciting addition to **Kentucky Kingdom** in years, and we can’t wait for families to experience this incredible land,” said General Manager **Sarah Worrell**. “**Discovery Meadow** is designed to spark family joy, adventure and connection like never before. It’s a true celebration of **Kentucky’s** beauty and spirit — bigger, bolder and more immersive than anything we’ve ever done.”

Discovery Meadow is Phase One of a two-year, \$25 million expansion. Later this season, the park plans to release information on \$14 million worth of improvements in 2026.



Robin and Scout the Squirrel are two new characters for **Discovery Meadow**. COURTESY KENTUCKY KINGDOM



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Busch Gardens Williamsburg celebrates 50th birthday with VIPs

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WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — On Friday, May 16, numerous invited guests, the media, longtime team members and loyal fans of **Busch Gardens Williamsburg** convened in the park's Globe Theater on the park's 50th birthday. Following a musical performance, the audience stayed for celebratory tributes.

Fifty years after the park opened, Park President **Kevin Lembke** took audience members through the history of Busch Gardens through a slide presentation. Many attractions — both past and present — received cheers and applause when their installation was noted.

Many VIPs in attendance were staff members whose longevity with the park was noted on a giant screen. It was all smiles as they were recognized.

Former Park President Donnie Mills (2003 – 2007) returned to the park to offer reflection of his time at the helm.

Following the history presentation, VIPs remained and enjoyed a reception in the theater lobby, complete with beverages, food, photo ops and a champagne toast.

Throughout the park, various sculptures create photo ops in acknowledgement of the park's milestone.

The park also honored five decades of thrills with a parkwide celebration for the public. The festivities included a 1970s cover band as well as a fireworks finale. Visitors also encountered historic signage and overlays on the park's original attractions. Guests could also enjoy special offers like 75-cent beer, a \$19.75 commemorative T-shirt and free cupcakes for park members.



Former Park President Donnie Mills returned to the Virginia theme park to say a few words. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Large photo op sculptures engage with guests during their visit. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Many team members took to the stage in acknowledgement of serving long years with Busch Gardens Williamsburg. AT/TIM BALDWIN



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SeaWorld's Expedition Odyssey blends ride technology, conservation

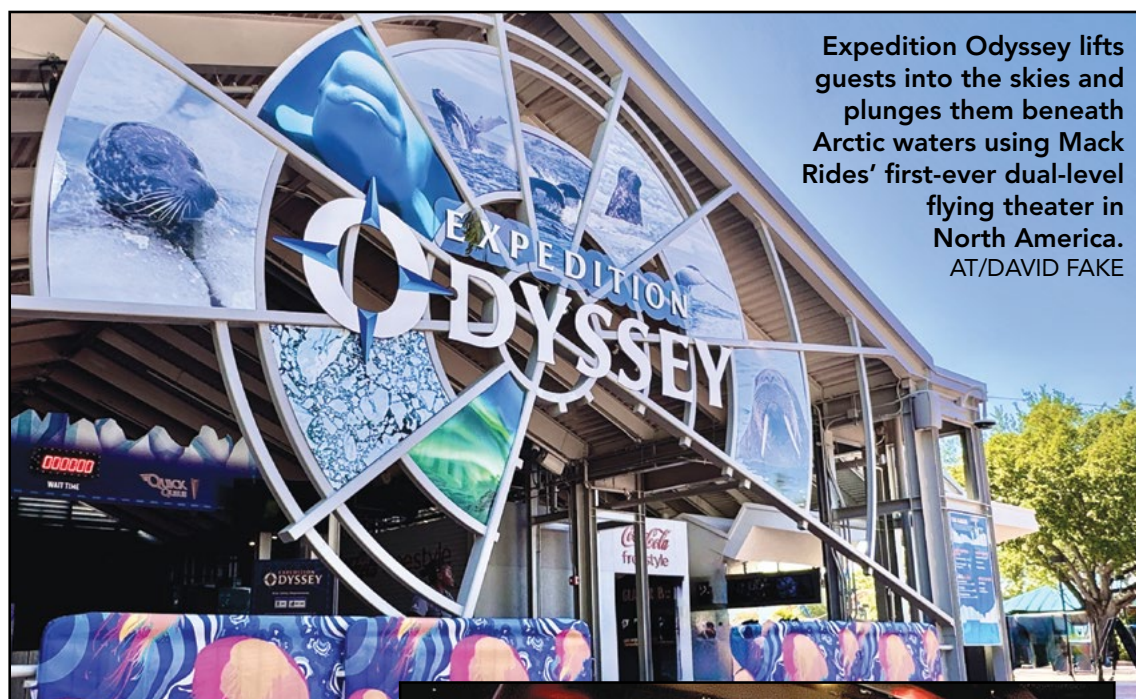
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ORLANDO—SeaWorld Orlando's newest attraction, Expedition Odyssey, may be built around a flying theater ride system, but the real heart of this experience lies just beyond the screen — in the waters and habitats of the park's Arctic animal exhibit. This latest addition reflects a noticeable shift in SeaWorld's focus: a return to merging moderate thrills with immersive, conservation-centered storytelling.

Built into the former Wild Arctic building, Expedition Odyssey consists of two dual-level flying theaters from Mack Rides — the first of its kind in North America. The ride transports guests on a visual journey through the Arctic, complete with glacial dives and underwater transitions, made possible through on-location wildlife cinematography captured over a year and a half.

"It's all real footage," emphasized **Conner Carr**, corporate director of rides and engineering at **United Parks & Resorts** SeaWorld Orlando's parent company. "There's no CGI, no fabricated environments or animals — every glacier, every animal you see was filmed in the Arctic. That's incredibly rare for this type of attraction." Carr noted that the camera movements were choreographed in advance to match the ride's planned motions. "We approached it like you'd storyboard a roller coaster," he explained.

But while the ride element is well-executed, the more lasting impression



Expedition Odyssey lifts guests into the skies and plunges them beneath Arctic waters using Mack Rides' first-ever dual-level flying theater in North America.
AT/DAVID FAKE

might come after the screen fades to an aroura. As guests exit, they're immediately immersed in SeaWorld's Arctic animal habitats — home to belugas, walrus and orcas featured moments earlier on-screen.

"It's a full-circle connection," said **Jon Peterson**, park president of SeaWorld Orlando. "You watch a beluga swim beneath the ice in the film, and then you step into its world. That's something we can offer here in a very real way."

Among the newest additions to that habitat is Uki, a rescued walrus calf whose story quietly grounds Expedition Odyssey in real conservation work. "She was only a few weeks old when she was found in northern Alaska — wounded and alone," said **Dr. Claire Erlacher-Reid**, senior veterinarian for SeaWorld Orlando. "She couldn't forage or survive on her own, so she was deemed non-



releasable and became part of our walrus family here."

Uki, whose full Inuit name is Ukiq, which means "survivor," was transported to Orlando after initial rehabilitation at the **Alaska SeaLife Center**. Her integration into SeaWorld's walrus group, under the care of veteran female walrus Caboodle, has been smooth and well-received.

"They've formed a strong bond," added **Staci Owens**, senior zoologist specialist. "She's also taken to Garfield, our 43-year-old male walrus, who's served as a mentor figure to many calves over the years. He lets them ride on his back—it's incredibly endearing to watch."

The attraction's dual nature — ride and habitat — is perhaps its most important feature. While the flying theater provides a visually rich overview of the Arctic's geography and wildlife, it's the in-person follow-up that reinforces the emotional and educational impact.

The film portion is presented without narration, supported by an original

orchestral score recorded in Budapest. According to Carr, this was a conscious choice. "We wanted guests to be in the moment, not pulled out of it by a voice telling them what to think," he said.

From a technical perspective, the ride offers motion profiles more dynamic than a traditional flying theater like that of other flying theater models from other manufacturers thanks to Mack Rides' ride system design with true vertical movement and a double-sided rotation loading mechanism.

"The motion is measured. It's a family ride," Carr said, noting the importance of making the attraction accessible to a wide range of guests. "We've added several coasters over the past few years, but we knew we needed something everyone could ride together."

The ride's minimum height requirement is just 39 inches—the lowest for any major attraction at SeaWorld Orlando. "We believe the best memories are made together," Carr added. "This is something kids, parents

and grandparents can all experience side by side."

The project was a unique opportunity for Mack Rides to integrate its most advanced flying theater mechanics with SeaWorld's deep commitment to animal care and conservation. Expedition Odyssey is not just a ride — it's a bridge between entertainment and education.

"The first [flying theater] we opened in Vietnam last year, but this is the first one in North America," said **Christian von Elverfeldt**, CEO of Mack Rides. "It improves the capacity a lot. We see [with other flying theaters] people sitting there. With their belts and putting bags away, it takes time. It is difficult to keep the capacity to what you expect to have."

This operational efficiency — achieved through a dual-sided, continuously rotating gondola structure — allows one group of guests to experience the film while another loads in, minimizing downtime and maximizing throughput without sacrificing show quality.

In addition to Uki and Garfield, the Arctic exhibit houses several other long-term residents, and enhancements to the habitat — including updated rockwork, improved lighting and cleaner water systems — make it a stronger educational space than ever. The footage shown in the ride mirrors these animals in a way that's meant to deepen understanding, not just dazzle.

"It's not a showpiece," Owens explained. "It's meant to start conversations."

In that regard, Expedition Odyssey feels less like a ride and more like a storytelling experience. The ride draws people in — but it's the animals and their caretakers who tell the real story. That very well may be the point.

"This attraction is about connection," said Peterson. "We're not just showing you something spectacular — we're inviting you to learn more, ask questions, and care about what happens next."



Uki, a rescued walrus calf from Alaska, now thrives in SeaWorld Orlando's Arctic habitat. AT/DAVID FAKE

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Vekoma's Serpentikah anchors expansion at Aztlán Parque Urbano

AT: Tim Baldwin
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MEXICO CITY — When Aztlán Parque Urbano opened in 2024 on the former site of La Feria Chapultepec Mágico (1992 – 2019), the goal was to present a new, modern, colorful, safe amusement park for families to enjoy. Even last year, audiences could see there was still more to come. This spring, the final components came to fruition, giving the new park a sense of completion. Four new rides arrived for 2025.

Among them is the park's largest roller coaster, Serpentikah. It is supplied by Vekoma.

"Aztlán Parque Urbano is located at the heart of Mexico City, surrounded by a gorgeous urban park (Bosque de Chapultepec) full of greenery and nature, which is an attraction by itself," said **Ricardo Tonding Etges**, sales, Vekoma. "Thousands of people (locals and tourists) flock to that area on weekends. As a result, Aztlán was conceived to be a park for families of all ages. And there is no better example of a family attraction for all ages than our Suspended Family Coaster model. It looks like a thrill coaster, rides like a family-thrill coaster and accommodates almost all family members, helping to broaden the appeal of the park."

Guests enter the queue and begin to explore a highly themed indoor space intended to set the stage for a story surrounding an archaeological expedition. The figure of Quetzalcoatl inspired the coaster's theme.



Serpentikah is Vekoma's longest and tallest Family Suspended Coaster to date.

COURTESY
AZTLÁN PARQUE URBANO

"Aztlán needed an iconic coaster that could be ridden by everyone. As a result, we offered our longest and tallest Suspended Family Coaster to date to the park," Etges told *Amusement Today*. "The ride also features a dark ride section which gave the park the opportunity to create and tell a story, offer a different ride experience and generate anticipation before the train climbs up the lift. It also includes two trains, increasing the capacity of the ride, which is critical, considering the high popularity of this model."

The restraint system is an overhead lap bar that allows for open, comfortable body freedom.

"The entire ride packs a punch," said Etges. "My favorite element is the initial drop, especially in the back, followed by the horseshoe



element. You experience unique family-thrill forces and elements on this ride that you don't commonly experience out there."

In addition to the large Vekoma coaster, another family-oriented coaster opened this spring. Laka Laka is supplied by **Fabbri** and is a spinning Wild Mouse coaster. This brings the park's roller coaster total to four.

A giant pendulum ride, Malachatonche (**Zamperla**),

and Vuela México Por El Mundo, a multi-sensory flying theater (Brogent Technologies), make up the final complement to this spring's additions. Brogent feels the first flying theater in Mexico is a new chapter for themed entertainment in the region.

"This is more than just an attraction; it's a celebration of culture, innovation and storytelling," said **Chih-Hung Ouyang**, chairman, Brogent

FAST FACTS

Serpentikah

Supplier:
Vekoma

Speed:
64 kmh/40 mph

Height:
23 meters/75 feet

Footprint:
83 by 75 meters/
272 feet by 246 feet

Length:
569 meters/1,867 feet

Passengers per train:
20

Height requirement:
1.05 meters/42 inches

Technologies. "We're proud to partner with Aztlán Parque Urbano to bring our flying theater experience to Mexico City and be part of this visionary new park. It aligns perfectly with the park's vision of sustainable, culturally rich entertainment and strengthens the city's role as a leading destination for global tourism and urban innovation."

"The inauguration of Vuela México Por El Mundo marks a significant milestone for cultural entertainment in the region," added **Sergio Hauea**, CEO, Aztlán Parque Urbano. "Vuela México Por El Mundo is more than an attraction, it's a journey that reflects our identity, blends innovation with storytelling and places Mexico City at the forefront of immersive, sustainable tourism."

The park has welcomed more than 1 million visitors in its first year.

"Aztlán is more alive than ever. All of our attractions are ready to welcome families, groups of friends, girls, boys, teens and adults alike," said **Erika Berumen**, spokesperson for Aztlán Urban Park.

Aztlán Parque Urbano has controlled attendance. Admission is free, but guests are required to use the park's electronic "wallet," free of charge. It is powered by **Intercard**.



Vuela México Por El Mundo from Brogent is the first flying theater in Mexico (above left). Laka Laka is a new spinning coaster provided by Fabbri (above right). COURTESY BROGENT TECHNOLOGIES, AZTLÁN PARQUE URBANO

Adventureland greeting visitors with new foods, new events, more

AT: Pam Sherborne
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ALTOONA, Iowa — When **Adventureland Resort** opened for its 51st season on May 17, visitors had a lot of new experiences. And, for many, that experience just might have something to do with food as the park is debuting three new food locations to its mix this year.

While hungry guests are finding that enticing, the park has other surprises in store. It unveiled its all-new water slide experience, **Hyperlight**, when the water park opened May 24.

The new food locations are adding brand-new food offerings. They include the **Lighthouse Lemonade**. It serves freshly squeezed and frozen lemonade. The new **Iowa Smokehouse** is offering smoked meats including ribs, brisket and jalapeno smoked sausage. And the new **Snack Barn** serves churros, pork chop on a stick, bacon on a stick and turkey legs.

"In addition to guest

favorites like Potato Patch fries and fresh-baked cookies, we're very excited to offer premium smoked meat entrees throughout the park this season," said **Tami Hansen**, park director of marketing. "Adding quality smoked products to our food lineup is something that guests are really going to enjoy."

With the **Hyperlight**, the park's **Typhoon** waterslide was renovated with vivid lights and surround sound. Featuring **iSlide Technology**, the new experience includes out-of-this-world color-changing lights in sync with lasers and dynamic surround sound, transforming the waterslide into an all-new full sensory experience.

Along with the new food and the **Hyperlight**, the park has released a list of its special events for this season. They include, for June, the all-new **Bacon and Brews** event and **Nerveless Nocks Electrifying Jetpack Water Circus**.

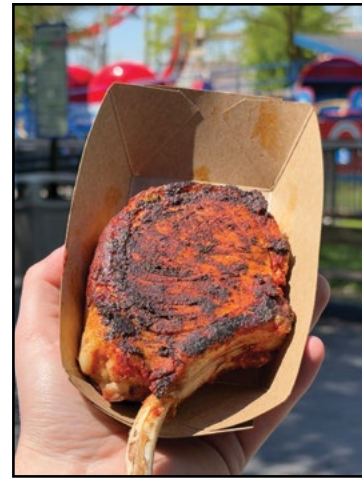
In July, the stunts continue with the **Off Axis Show**.



Along with other enhancements this season, **Adventureland** is debuting new food locations offering new menu items such as smoked meats (above left) and pork chop on a stick (above right). COURTESY ADVENTURELAND

In August, there will be meet-and-greets with characters from some favorite PBS Kids shows each weekend. Visitors can expect to meet characters of **Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood**, **Donkey Hodie** and **Alma's Way** on a rotating basis during the first-ever **Neighbor Days** event series.

Adventureland Resort will close out the 2025 season with **Oktoberfest** and **Phantom Fall Fest**.



In other **Adventureland** Park news, park officials announced the closing of the **Adventureland Inn**. The hotel, which originally opened in 1973, will be converted into employee housing.

Last fall, it was announced that the inn would be closed during the off-season. The **Adventureland Inn** has gone through many changes, including a project in 2002 that

doubled the size of the hotel.

"At **Adventureland**, we have continued to provide the best guest experience for our visitors through the addition of new events, new rides and attractions, and ongoing park-wide improvements," said **Mike Lusky**, park general manager. "With our continued focus on guest experience, we have decided to close the **Adventureland Inn** and convert the property into on-site employee housing as we grow our workforce."

The **Adventureland Campground** is still open for guests, as is the **Spectators Sports Bar & Grill**, Lusky said.

The campground is located within steps of the park. This is a full-service campground with complete facilities, including electric and sewer hookups, modern showers and restrooms, RV facilities, tent camping, dog run, swimming pool and recreational areas.

"This summer season is going to be one of the best yet," Lusky said.

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Busch Gardens Williamsburg resurrects a legend with vengeance

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — Celebrating its 50th anniversary, **Busch Gardens** is reaching into its history to bring a beloved classic back. Both old and new, Big Bad Wolf: The Wolf's Revenge is a crowd-pleaser.

Built by **Bolliger & Mabillard** (B&M), the family inverted coaster officially opened to the public on May 23 following a weekend of passholder previews. Early riders were enthusiastic about the Wolf's return.

Tucked away into the depths of the Oktoberfest section, this new incarnation is kept somewhat in mystery. Like the original suspended coaster built by **Arrow** in 1984, not everything about the experience can be seen from the walkway. In fact, this new attraction is quite secluded, and guests are bound to find several surprises.

The original Big Bad Wolf is one of the most cherished rides from the park's past. After it closed in 2009, the park built another roller coaster on the site: Verbolten by **Zierer**. It was a fun, new experience that mimicked the signature drop toward the water's surface below. Still, fans missed the Wolf.

"There is such a legacy of the Big Bad Wolf brand," said **Kevin Lembke**, park president. "It's one of the two or three rides I hear about the most. So, how do we bring this back in a new way; not necessarily replicate but pay homage to the

original? But this new ride is its own thing."

Now during the milestone year for the park, fans can rejoice that a new Wolf is on the prowl. This one checks a lot of boxes.

For those who yearned for the old experience, this new Big Bad Wolf once again races through a quaint village, with riders' feet whisking close to the town's windows. The ride still has two lifts, but there is also an Easter egg nod to Drachen Fire. But there are many more thematic elements that make this reincarnation a lot of fun visually.

Speaking of Drachen Fire, the new Big Bad Wolf: The Wolf's Revenge not only sits on the site of that Arrow coaster but also repurposes its station. Once Drachen Fire was removed a few years after the multilooper's closure, the park used the station as a haunted house. Now it has been refreshed with wolf carvings and various details. There is even a large bell to ring out when riders are dispatched.

The layout is curving and twisted and soars up and over itself as well as diving and skimming close to the ground. The top speed of Big Bad Wolf: The Wolf's Revenge is 40 mph, and the track length is 2,583 feet. Riders as tall as 42 inches are able to ride with a supervising companion (or alone if at least 48 inches tall).

"I am hoping we get a ton of kids saying, 'That was my first roller coaster.' People still tell me their first



The new Big Bad Wolf: The Wolf's Revenge (above) is the fourth coaster from B&M at Busch Gardens Williamsburg. The wolf's face on the front of the trains feature eyes that glow (right).
COURTESY BUSCH GARDENS; AT/TIM BALDWIN



roller coaster stories when they are 40, 50 years old," smiled Lembke. "But there's enough thrill and certainly enough storytelling and theming for families, enthusiasts, whomever — I believe it is the perfect blend."

"What I love about this ride is that it is truly a family experience," said **Conner Carr**, corporate vice president, rides and engineering. "Everybody gets to ride it together; we love our parks being fun for the whole family."

Two trains seat 20 riders each. Restraints are overhead lap bars that offer an abundance of comfortable freedom for the upper body.

Unlike the original, riders' feet dangle freely.

One of the sharpest features on the train is that the eyes on the front glow, which makes it an even cooler ride to experience at night.

"The old Big Bad Wolf lives in this ride," Carr told *Amusement Today*. "There are so many nods to it we really wanted to show off. We wanted to play on that nostalgia but give it a modern twist — add some new theming elements and include onboard audio. There are so many ideas you can do, so you ask, 'What do the guests want?' What's going to bring the nostalgic and the new experience as well?"

Of the park's collection of 11 roller coasters, this is the first one to feature onboard sound. From dramatic music to howls of the wolf, the audio helps continue the story aspect of the attraction.

Big Bad Wolf: The Wolf's Revenge is the fourth B&M roller coaster at the park.



The original Big Bad Wolf (above left) was a swinging suspended coaster from Arrow that operated from 1984 to 2009. The park listened to its guests who had a deep love for the classic coaster when deciding to create a new version (above right).
AT/GARY SLADE, TIM BALDWIN

Park Post-its



AT: Pam Sherborne
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Idlewild and SoakZone, Pennsylvania's longest-operating amusement park, opened for its 148th season on Saturday, May 17, in the town of Ligonier. Families can look forward to a summer packed with park-wide improvements, brand new entertainment, extended fun in the Idlewild water park, SoakZone, and visits from one of the biggest attractions of the year, literally.

New for 2025, park guests will notice several enhancements throughout Idlewild. Some of those enhancements include Rollo Coaster upgrades, refresh of the Story Book Forest, Wild Mouse upgrades, Carousel improvements, Breakfast Bites & Sweet Delights new food stand and a new drink refill station.

New for SoakZone Water Park includes an extended season, new shows, the World's Largest Rubber Duck (June 27 to June 29) and several new events.

A wild-west themed amusement park in Maggie Valley, North Carolina, may see a revival, according to the **National Amusement Park Historical Association** (NAPHA).

A story that ran in the *Citizens Times* stated that regional travel guide website, Blue Ridge Mountain Life, noted that some refer to **Ghost Town Village**, formerly known as **Ghost Town in the Sky**, as a "cursed amusement park."

"The gloomy title refers to the many failed attempts to reopen the park, which was once a popular attraction, but has not been open since 2009," the story stated. "NAPHA made a Facebook post on May 9, stating that a potential buyer from Florida expressed interest in the defunct amusement park."

The same post said that current owner **Jill McClure**, who inherited the property, aims to sell it for entertainment purposes rather than to a buyer who will use it for housing. The buyer envisions "a venue featuring country music, rodeos, and festivals, aiming to keep the park family-friendly."

Parking near **Arnolds Park Amusement Park**, Arnolds Park, Iowa, has been at a premium since the park had to sell a portion of its parking lot in an effort to keep the gates open around the turn of the century.

City Manager **Linda Nase** says tourists will see some new on-street parking on West Broadway Avenue this summer, both for passenger vehicles and the golf carts, which have exploded in popularity, according to a story that ran in *Northwest Iowa Now*.

Some utilities that were on the green space have been moved, allowing more room for parking.

Officials at **Cliff's Amusement Park**, Albuquerque, New Mexico, decided to be proactive this summer season in regard to a rise in juvenile crime in the metro area. Management has announced a new policy aimed at minors. As of the second week in May, anyone 17 years old or younger now has to have an adult 21 years old or older with them. One chaperone may accompany up to five minors and must remain in the park during the visit.

The summer of 2025 will also see new rides at the park, including Balloon Wheel kiddie ride and an Air Race. Reopening this summer is the Bumper Cars.

RES Rides announced last month the opening of their Super Swing M20 at **Gröna Lund, Parks and Resorts Scandinavia** in Stockholm, Sweden. Gröna Lund named the ride Pumpen and opened it to delighted thrill-seeking crowds on April 26.

According to the company's website, RES Rides began collaborating with Gröna Lund in 2022 after they expressed an interest in a unique, one-of-a-kind thrill ride.

The story stated: "**Roman Rothe**, CEO of RES, says 'Gröna Lund came to us and told us what they were looking for. We adapted our Super Swing M20 to deliver the kind of thrill and excitement that they were looking for. We're super excited about Pumpen!'"

Blackpool Pleasure Beach Resort, Blackpool, U.K., unveiled a huge new revamp of one of its most beloved rides, and it's set to launch people off with a blast, according to the *Manchester Evening News*.

Soaring riders 210 feet into the sky in just a matter of seconds, Launch Pad takes riders on a journey into space as they undertake a mission featuring G-Force thrills and moments of weightlessness.

The revamp of the ride, which includes new theming and elements not seen in the attraction before, has been a year in the making.

First opened in 1997, the ride from **S&S** started its life as PlayStation: The Ride. It changed to Ice Blast in 2002.

U.K.'s **Alton Towers** reopened Skyride for 2025, after a massive rehab, on May 3. Dogs are allowed to travel on the Skyride.

A story on *Stock on Trent Live* stated that the Skyride has stations in Towers Street, Forbidden Valley and Fountain Square, and each journey between stations takes five minutes.

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Europa-Park celebrates 50th anniversary with numerous expansions

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

RUST, Germany — When conversing in a discussion with IAAPA President **Jakob Wahl**, **Roland Mack**, founder of **Europa-Park**, was asked if he could have envisioned 50 years ago what the world-renowned park and resort has become. Mack told the room full of IAAPA members, “If I could have, I never would have done it!”

Despite his humorous take, Mack and the entire Mack family should feel immensely proud. Europa-Park has gone on to see phenomenal growth and enormous success. In addition to the award-winning theme park, the spectacular **Rulantica** water park and six hotels, the resort offers so much more. Today, the Europa-Park resort is the largest hotelier in Germany.

Things look bright. “We’ve had the best April we’ve ever had, and the hotels are already booked to 80% occupancy for this year,” he told *Amusement Today*.

Guests enjoy celebrating milestones, and the park has positioned numerous “50” photo ops around the park, some larger than life, others filled with flower arrangements.

Still, there are many new things for guests to experience, as well as expansions behind the scenes.

For visitors, the new **Ed and Edda Grand Prix EDventure** adds yet another experience to Europa-Park’s diverse portfolio of dark rides. It is based on the IP of the upcoming **Warner Bros.** film *Ed and Edda Grand Prix*

of *Europe*, created by **Mack Magic** and to be released internationally.

In a partnership between **Mack Rides**, **Mack Magic** and **Lagotronics**, the new attraction replaces the former circular theater of the **Historama**. Built in a round fashion, the 12 sets of ride vehicles are positioned back to back, so guests traverse the circuit twice, sometimes facing inward and also facing outward. Rotation of the seats adds to the fun.

Mack Rides built the ride system, Mack Magic provided the media content, and Lagotronics supplied the gaming system.

“My favorite thing is that it is the newest version of the gameplay theater, which is the biggest footprint and largest capacity ride,” said **Mark Beumers**, CEO, Lagotronics. “With the throughput it has, it still provides a great experience for every individual, which is what makes it special. We’ve done rides with Mack in the past, and this new ride concept has come as a mutual idea as a rotating ride. Mack Rides is a professional company; they have a high-quality approach. We have the same vision — high quality, low maintenance and great experience as a total package.”

“You have a great capacity on a small footprint,” said **Christian von Elverfeldt**, CEO, Mack Rides. “The whole thing is four and a half minutes, so you have a long ride.”

The attraction can accommodate more than 1,100 people an hour. Riders load in three sets of four, dispatching a trio of groups every 38 seconds.

“It’s a good use of space,”



Near the front of the park, a gigantic “50” is placed for photo ops (above). Europa-Park has spread numerous such numbers throughout the property, many of them with flowers. The new ride, **Ed and Edda’s Grand Prix EDventure** (below), ties in with the upcoming film from **Warner Bros.** AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY EUROPA-PARK



added von Elverfeldt. “It’s a beautiful ride and a great idea. It didn’t require a lot of innovation; it works very well.”

During the ride, players engage with 10 scenes, and an animatronic proclaims the winner in the final scene. Outside, a racing vibe is maintained with grandstands for people to sit in and relax.

Nearby, the annual parade has been updated with 11 enhanced floats, includ-

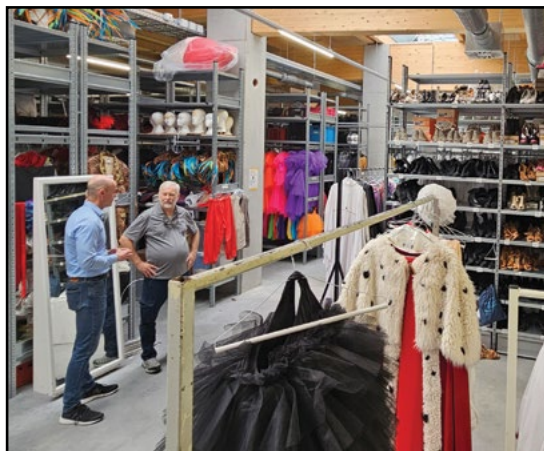
ing new ones. Naturally, the park’s 50th plays an integral part of the theme.

The **Arena Show** in the park’s Spanish section has been a staple at the park with its large cast and live horses. Performed in the round, it not only presents a new stunt show this year, “**Legend of Zorro**,” but the entire theater also received a retractable roof. This has numerous advantages. It places guests

away from glaring sunlight into the shade, it allows the show to be performed in rainy weather, and new lighting features can be implemented in a covered theater. The roof covers the theater just before the show and retracts following the conclusion.

A Europa-Park 50th anniversary exhibition is constructed within the large

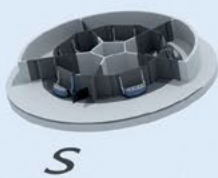
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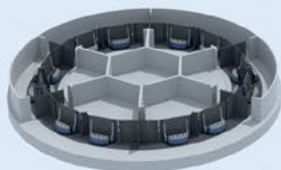
The newly built entertainment hall (above left) allows for massive space for housing and maintaining the elaborate floats in the parade (above right). On upper floors, a large space is provided for the creation and repair of costumes. A vast storage area organizes 30,000 costume pieces (above middle). AT/TIM BALDWIN

MACK RIDES PRESENTS

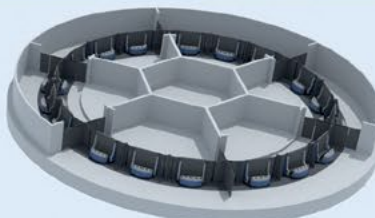
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A large timeline lets visitors relive the park's history. AT/TIM BALDWIN

Amusement Today sits down with Europa-Park's Dr. Roland Mack

AT: Back in the 1970s, was there one thing that made you and your father open a theme park?

Roland Mack: We (Mack Rides) were involved with the park industry before that because we delivered rides to America already, and we had seen the development of the parks there. When we visited America, theme parks were brand new to me. I suddenly felt this could be something our business could invest in. We had the possibilities to do so and there was nothing similar in the market in Europe. There was Tivoli Copenhagen, there was Liseberg, Efteling was a small fairytale park, but the real theme park industry was not heavily developed. I felt it was missing, especially in this southern corner of Germany. And we could guarantee, at least, what rides the park would need.

We felt we could deliver the rides and someone else would run the place. There may be restaurant people who would operate the restaurant side of the business. We weren't thinking of hotels at that time of our start. It changed when the man who should run the park died suddenly. There was no one to run the place, and I was in the final months of my studies. I had to make the choice. I was educated as a mechanical engineer, but there was nobody, and my father was needed at the production company, so I decided to come here.

Looking back, is there one thing for which you are particularly grateful?

Health. If you weren't healthy in this business, you couldn't afford spending, working long hours, long days, long weeks without vacation. Health is the most important thing. My father, at the age of 89, was [involved] to the last day.

Also, we started with nothing here. It was a financial risk. You had to convince banks and convince people to sell their land. I did about a thousand contracts. After the war, lands in Germany were very small. If one person doesn't sell their land, even if it's small, you can't develop. So that was good luck that convinced people to sell. It's very difficult to change farmland into industrial land with all the permits in Europe. Very complicated. I think it would be impossible for a family business nowadays.

How would you attribute the hotels as an important part of Europa-Park's success?

The hotels have two points. In the beginning, we felt we had a need. People told us: "The park is too big and we had to drive too much. Where can we stay overnight?" There was a demand. But by building the hotels, we could grow because our catchment area was getting bigger. It means repeat business, which is 80% for us. And themed hotels helped that visit continue without a break. It was another themed area. They are involved the whole time in this themed environment. That gives them the real feeling of a short-break vacation.

How do you feel the employees would describe you?

"That if he wants something to be done, we better do it right away, otherwise he may be angry (chuckling). But he is a man we can also discuss with on the same eye level. And he is very respectful to us and our job." I think they feel I love what they do, and that is true.

The park has a wide assortment of Mack rides, but there are attractions from other manufacturers in the industry. Why is that important?

You have the demand of the client. You have to develop the park in exchange with your customers, otherwise you will not be successful. If the customer wants a big roller coaster — and Mack didn't build big roller coasters many years ago — we have to order a ride from another supplier. When we needed something and [Mack Rides] didn't build it — for example, the rapids river — why not? The most important issue in the park is the client, our guest.

► EUROPA

Continued from page 22

building housing the Silver Star hypercoaster station. A detailed timeline of the park spotlights the growth and highlights through the years.

But not everything is geared toward guests. A new, five-story entertainment hall in the administrative areas brings major upgrades for those working behind the scenes.

One of the ground floors is a vast parade float containment area. Heated floors (owing to winter parades) and entrance/exit portals at each end make storing and maintaining the gorgeous floats efficient.

On higher floors, new digs for the entertainment department take efficiency and organization to a higher level. Costume repair and creation areas are now spacious, and storage facilities create an organized space for more than 30,000 costume pieces.

With new residential units to aid in housing 1,500 employees who come from more than 100 (!) countries, staffing is also seeing upgraded enhancements.

In addition to the theme

park and administrative areas, resort guests have something to wow them during the 50th anniversary. The park's campground is undergoing a huge transformation into Silver Lake City. When completed this summer, the log cabins, stagecoaches and tee-pee accommodation units will see more upscale cabins, a new bar, restaurant and other amenities in a thematic environment that capitalizes on the Old West.

Adjacent to that, near the front entrance, is a new parking garage.

Europa-Park has been a labor of love for the Mack family for five decades. That love shown by each family member has led to the park's amazing success.

When asked by AT if the best was still yet to come, Roland Mack replied: "If I didn't believe in this question, I feel I would have to leave the industry. I always think the world has to develop and grow and offer new ideas. Why shouldn't they be better than the old things? If I look back at when we started very small, I think we had the best of the best, but today it's even better. Why should this cycle stop?"



The new parade (above) carries an anniversary theme. A new retractable roof on the Spanish Arena covers the audience and performers during the show (below).

COURTESY EUROPA-PARK; AT/TIM BALDWIN



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Fritz's Adventure brings scalable fun for all ages to North Texas

AT: Rachel Hawkins
Special to Amusement Today

THE COLONY, Texas — On April 2, the Colony's newest family entertainment center, **Fritz's Adventure**, opened its doors to excited guests as part of the **Grandscape** outdoor shopping and entertainment complex. The 100,000-square-foot adventure park is the second from the company and encompasses both indoor and outdoor thrills for all ages.

"We are thrilled to open our doors at Grandscape and become a part of one of the nation's top entertainment hubs," said **Matt Engram**, owner and chief executive officer of Fritz's Adventure, in a statement on the company's website. "Our mission is to create 'wow' moments by providing a space where families and friends can come together to challenge themselves and make lasting memories."

As guests enter the building, they are surrounded by more than 130,000 bricks and walls made from shipping containers. The facility features a 5,000-pound suspended airplane as well as several 45-foot-tall zipline towers that take guests on aerial tours inside and outside the building. In addition, there are underground and overhead explorable tunnels.

Additionally, guests may climb, wiggle through, crawl under and explore a variety of unique adventure attractions.



The centerpiece of Fritz's Adventure is a 5,000-pound airplane suspended alongside the facility's colorful RCI ropes course (above). The FEC allows guests to climb its encompassing brick walls (below left). COURTESY OF RACHEL HAWKINS



There is a utility pole with rungs on the side, a ladder going up the side of an oil silo, the opportunity to pass through the hanging airplane and even investigate an old cement mixer. Alongside ziplining through the rafters, thrill seekers can take advantage of scrambling up the inside of a water tower, scaling the side of a building and sitting in the cockpit of a real airplane.

The biggest and most

notable feature inside the building is the multistory, colorful rope course from **Ropes Courses Incorporated (RCI)**. Similar to the model operating at Fritz's Adventure location in Branson, Missouri, the RCI rope course features Sky Trail with several elements and a mechanical Sky Rail. The ropes course and Sky Rail attraction have a capacity of more than 50 participants per hour.

Guests can channel their inner Spider-Man along a scalable 48-foot-tall indoor urban landscape. Along these climbable city walls, adventurers can climb up the fire escape and over boarded windows, using windowsills and downspouts as footholds. Naturally, harnesses and industry-leading auto-belay technology keep everyone secure during the fun.

Climbers can test their

skills by ascending to the top of an old building on obstacles that cater to various abilities, ranging from novices eager to learn to seasoned climbers seeking new challenges.

A climbable softer area designed for smaller children is located underneath the multistory climbing structure.

The FEC's indoor/outdoor TreeTop Zipline course is equipped with safety harnesses and includes expert guides. It is designed to ensure a fun and secure adventure through the rafters and then outside to towers along the neighboring Sam Rayburn Tollway.

Putting a new slant on the escapades, Fritz's Adventure features three warped walls where guests can discover their inner ninja warrior. There is a seven-foot wall for beginners, a 12-foot wall for the intermediate explorer and the 14-foot Mammoth for advanced wall ninjas.

Not all the fun is in the air. Guests can explore caves, exciting slides and a complex underground labyrinth. Suitable for family members of all ages, these features were designed to promote problem-solving and sheer enjoyment.

A cafe offers menu items such as sandwiches and pizza for guests to refuel during their visit. Coffee, smoothies, beer and wine are also available for purchase.

•fritzsadventure.com



Guests can test their climbing skills along a scalable 48-foot-tall indoor urban landscape (above left). Several 45-foot-tall zipline towers take guests on aerial tours inside and outside the building (above middle). Guests of all ages can explore caves, exciting slides and a complex underground labyrinth (above right). COURTESY FRITZ'S ADVENTURE



Up And Overboard

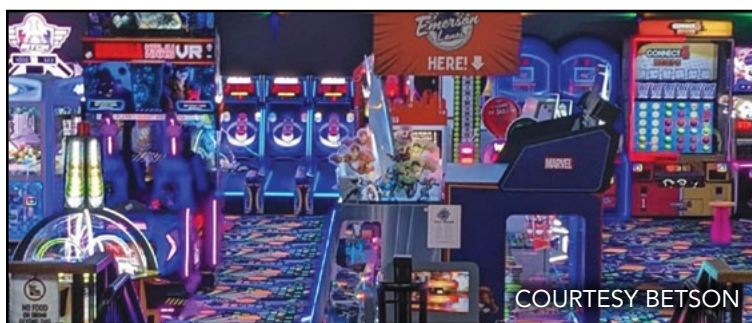


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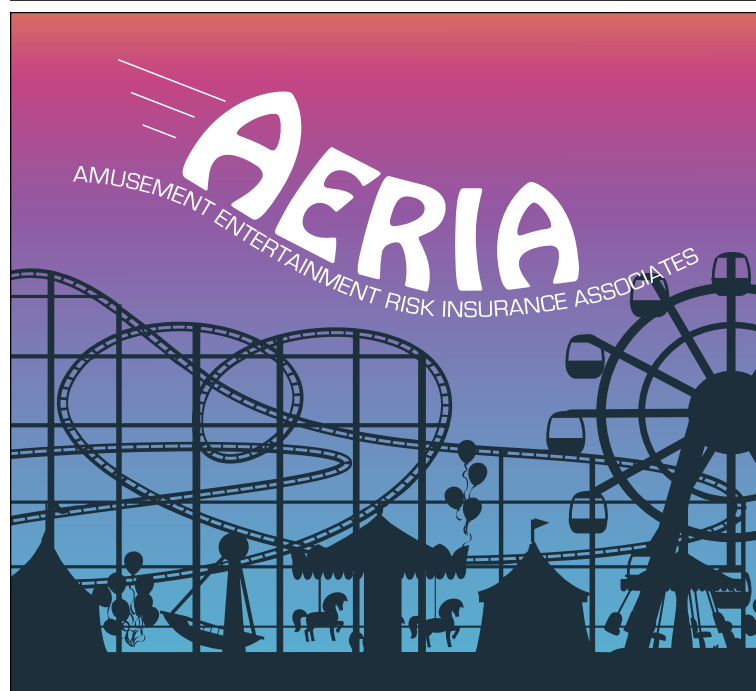
Emerson Lanes expands with a new arcade courtesy of Betson

PARKERSBURG, W. Va. — **Emerson Lanes**, a long-standing and family-owned bowling center in Parkersburg, West Virginia, has expanded its business with the launch of a new arcade game room designed and installed by **Betson Enterprises**.

"We're always looking for unique ways to serve our community," said Jerry Lorenze. "Adding an arcade has helped us reach people who may not have visited us otherwise."

Looking to diversify and bring something fresh to the Mid-Ohio Valley Region, owners **Jerry and Gregg Lorenze** chose to partner with Betson and Regional Sales Director **Mike Springman** to create an experience that appeals to both regular bowlers and new guests.

Since the arcade's opening, Emerson Lanes has seen a steady increase in business. The addition has allowed the center to bundle new entertainment packages and host more family-friendly events.



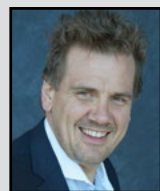
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FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRAL

AT: John W.C. Robinson
jrobinson@amusementtoday.com

Five Iron Golf announced two major expansions: a brand-new Flatiron flagship in New York City, opening in 2026, and a first-of-its-kind family entertainment center in Shaker Heights, Ohio, opening in late 2025.

Five Iron Golf has become a category-defining leader by blending the serious side of the game — lessons, fittings and practice — with the fun side such as corporate events, kids' parties and date nights. Five Iron has built a space where every type of golfer belongs.

Five Iron's journey began at 19th and 5th Avenue in New York City. It's time for the next chapter — just a few blocks away at 611 6th Avenue. The new location will be over 50% larger, expanding from 10 to 13 **Trackman** simulators, with enhanced locker rooms, lounge areas and an all-new bar and dining experience.

"It's bittersweet to move from our first location — and our namesake," said **Jared Solomon**, co-founder and CEO of Five Iron Golf. "The 'Five' in Five Iron was a nod to 5th Avenue, and no, we're not changing our name to Six Iron."

Roller is deepening its commitment to family entertainment centers (FECs) by expanding its support for karting — a dynamic and fast-growing attraction.

"FECs are increasingly blending activities like karting, laser tag and arcade gaming to deliver memorable experiences," said **Luke Finn**, CEO and founder. "Roller's additional focus on karting strengthens our ability to support modern attractions as they innovate and grow."

To lead this expansion, Roller has welcomed three seasoned industry professionals to the team: **Wes Ratcliff** as general manager, karting; **Matt Newell** as customer success manager, karting and **Christina Bartlett** as customer success manager, karting. The trio brings decades of hands-on experience in venue operations and karting-specific technology, ensuring Roller remains closely aligned with the needs of operators on the ground.

Semnox Solutions has announced the successful deployment of its all-in-one venue

management system at **Pulse Arena**, a newly launched indoor amusement park in Sibenik, Croatia. This marks Semnox's first installation in Croatia, extending its footprint across Europe and reinforcing its role as a global leader in technology solutions for the leisure and attractions industry.

"Pulse Arena is a modern attraction venue designed to meet core leisure needs of families, especially those with kids," said Antonio Burić, assistant director at Pulse Arena. "We are confident that we have chosen the ideal partner for our venture."

Designed to offer high-energy entertainment for families and thrill-seekers alike, Pulse Arena features a wide array of attractions including a trampoline park, VR experiences and soft play zones for young children. The venue also houses Pizzaholic, a themed restaurant and bar that complements the entertainment offerings with unique food and beverage options.

Kalahari Resorts & Conventions announced the launch of the **Kalahari Adventure Collection**, a new property tier defined by distinctive, experience-driven accommodations that invite guests to explore, connect and discover in unexpected ways. The first destination under this banner is underway in Wisconsin Dells, with a bold mix of elevated treehouses, lakefront cabins and spacious villas, opening in 2026.

"The Kalahari Adventure Collection is a natural extension of the Kalahari brand," said **Todd Nelson**, CEO and founder of Kalahari Resorts & Conventions. "While we'll always be known for our indoor water parks and convention experiences, we're continuing to evolve — creating destination stays that are as unique as the memories they inspire. This new tier gives us room to dream bigger."

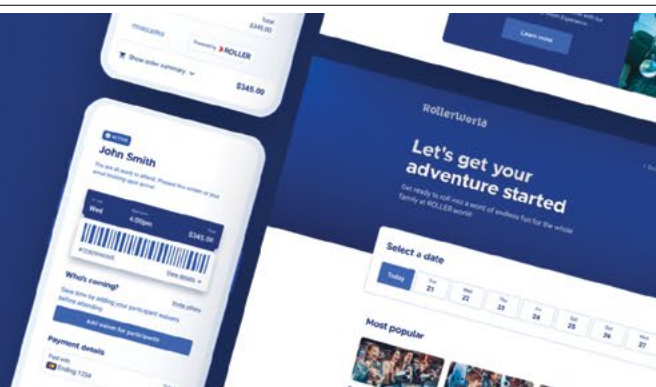
Construction is actively underway in Wisconsin Dells. Work on the Treehouse Resort began in May and rough framing has started to take shape — giving guests their first glimpse of the immersive accommodations to come.

"We're always looking for ways to push the boundaries of what's possible," added Nelson.

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Two days of high winds hampers attendance at Yuma County Fair

AT: B. Derek Shaw

bdshaw@amusementtoday.com

YUMA, Ariz. — “Our opening day and April 2nd killed our numbers because we had the worst wind we’ve seen for many years,” said Frances Garcia, marketing coordinator, Yuma County Fair, Inc. “I believe it was approximately 40 mph, so the attendance was probably our record low. This obviously hurt our numbers, but we are very happy with the attendance overall.”

The six-day fair drew approximately 100,000, which was down 8% due to a pair of excessively windy days. The theme of the 73rd annual fair was “Creating Memories & Building Dreams.”

Helm and Sons Amusements, the midway provider, brought 45 total rides, with 20 for kiddie land. The Colton, California, operation also



had 20 games and seven food stands.

Five rides were new to that spot this year. They included Diamond, a 33-meter observation wheel (Lamberink); Star Fighter (Battech Enterprises); Conjuring, a two-story dark ride (Europa Rides); Cub kiddie wheel (Amusement Devices & Manufacturing, ADM Rides) and Hyperdrive (Wisdom Rides). Helm and Sons said this was a six-year custom build.

The three most popular rides were the Diamond wheel (Lamberink); Olympic bobsled (SDC Galaxi) coaster and Sleigh



The three most popular rides were the Diamond wheel, Olympic bobsled coaster and Sleighride. Ride midway revenue was \$1,290,000. COURTESY YUMA COUNTY FAIR

Ride (Mack Rides). The ride midway revenue was \$1,290,000.

“Yuma is always great to work with, and they have been doing a lot of improvements over the last two years, so it’s fun to be a part of that as well,” said Davey Helm, CEO and

third-generation owner of Helm and Sons.

The fair had an equally good experience. “We were very happy with the set-up, the amount of rides and the variety,” said Garcia.

Helm spoke about employment challenges throughout the year for his

operation. “The H2B program (non-agricultural seasonal labor) continues to be where we pull the majority of our teammates every year. Like most in the business, [the process] is very stressful and hard to land the

► See YUMA, page 30

TWO LIQUIDATIONS UNDERWAY IN OHIO!

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 - Maui Wowie (Surf Coaster) — double inner-tube ride — \$19,000
- Cowabunga Curl (Surf Coaster) — three entwined body slides — \$39,000
- Big Kahuna (Waterworld) — gravity driven water coaster — \$29,000
- Hang Ten (Surf Coaster) — enclosed, unlit single mat slide — \$29,000
- Pipeline Plunge — enclosed translucent tubular body slide — \$19,000
- Big Creek Beach (Whitewater) — dump bucket, water cannons, four slides — \$59,000
 - Zuma Falls (Surfcoaster) — open tube dual slides — \$9,000
 - Soaring Eagle Zip Line — \$49,000
 - ADA Elevator for Zip Line (needs re-certified) — \$29,000
 - 1999 NBGS Master Blaster — \$650,000
- Whitewater (1999) & RKM (2013) Slides, single tower (double raft, mat racer) — \$175,000
- 1986 Aqua Mag Triple Flume (w/ tower) — BEST OFFER!

- 2016 RCI 8 Pole Ropes course
- 2016 Whitewater Ballocity
- 2016 Spin Zone 8 Car Bumper Car
- 2016 Allied Mini Bowling (four lanes)
- 2016 IdeasX Climbing Walls (three total)
- 2016 Zone Laser Tag (24 vest, targets, two bases)
- 2016 Mezzanine for Laser Tag
- Creative Works Arena and Theming
- Intercard System (card readers, kiosk, POS system)
- Assorted Food & Beverage Equipment
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- Prize and Food Service Inventories
- 2009 Zamperla 15-meter Sky Tower — \$150,000
- 2009 Zamperla Mini Discovery — \$225,000

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Helm and Sons brought 45 rides with 20 kiddie ones. They also had 20 games and seven food stands. COURTESY YUMA COUNTY FAIR

►YUMA
Continued from page 29

proper number of employees in the timeframe needed. Luckily, there's a group of showmen working out there for the greater good, including **Michael Woods** and **Blake Houston**, who are on the forefront of getting language changed for our industry, for the greater good and our future."

"Our gate prizes are probably the lowest in the state of Arizona at \$7 for general admission, \$5 for youth and 5 years and under are free," said

Garcia. "All the entertainment on our main stage, demo derby, strolling acts, family's stage and theatre building entertainment is included in the entrance fee. We also provide entertainment at one of our stages from the time we open until we close our gates. We also have a large livestock show with sales and entries from 4H, FFA and our general public."

Even with its low cost, the Yuma County Fair did offer Two Dollar Tuesdays, where everyone got in for only \$2 at the gate. With a fair marketing budget of \$30,000, the money is spent on radio and television advertising, while the social media team tries to reach the largest population possible through various social channels.

On opening day, Tuesday, the fair opened at 3 p.m. Closing times varied each night. Wednesday through Sunday gates opened at noon.

A couple of new food items at this year's fair included mac and cheese, spam fries and boba king specialty drinks.

Fairgoers experienced new things at this year's edition.

"We featured our brand-

new fair set up, with new walkways, fences and parking lots," said Garcia. The highlight was our new Legacy Event Center — this is where all of our nonfood commercial vendors were set up. It was a great experience."

Easton Corbin was the entertainment headliner, drawing a large crowd. The fair also held a 25-car demolition derby on Wednesday evening.

The Yuma County Fair did not encounter any employment challenges.

"We are very lucky; we've had the same temporary staff for the last 10 to 15 years with very low need for new staff. We have a parking crew, gate staff, beer staff and our grounds maintenance teams. We are all very successful with minimal hiccups year after year," said Garcia.

"We have one of the most amazing fairs that offers a great variety of entertainment, food, commercial vendors, carnival, open entries, 4H, FFA Exhibits, livestock shows... all at the lowest price in the state of Arizona," he added.

While the fair returns March 31 to April 5, 2026, the third annual Fall Fest takes place October 16-19, 2025, and will also offer carnival rides.

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Black Out, a KMG ride, was a popular attraction among the thrill seekers who attended the six-day fair. COURTESY YUMA COUNTY FAIR



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Agricultural festival features midway with more than two dozen rides

AT: Ron Gustafson
Special to Amusement Today

RALEIGH, N.C. — **Brinkley Entertainment**, Walnut Cove, N.C., provided a midway with 20 rides at the **Got To Be N.C. Agriculture Festival**, May 16 to 18, at the state fairgrounds Raleigh, North Carolina.

The ride lineup featured classics such as a Paratrooper and Roundup (**Frank Hrubetz & Co.**), Roll-O-Plane (**Eyerly Aircraft**), Frolic (**King Amusement Co.**), Tempest (**Grover Watkins**) and helicopter (**Allan Herschell**).

B & K Carnival, Gresham, S.C., supplemented the midway with rides, including a Yo-Yo (**Chance Rides**), Expo Wheel (**Childress**) and Rock Star (**A.R.M. USA**).

All-day wristbands sold for \$35 with individual ride tickets also available.



Riders take a spin on the Tornado from Wisdom Rides of America. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



B & K Carnival presented its Expo Wheel during the festival. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



Rock Star was a featured attraction, presented by B & K Carnival. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



This classic Roll-O-Plane, themed as Hog Drop, was on the Brinkley Entertainment midway. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



Youngsters enjoyed the swing ride at the festival. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



A Paratrooper glided on the Brinkley Entertainment midway. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



Umbrella rides were popular on the midway at the Got To Be NC Agriculture Festival. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

► See FESTIVAL, page 33



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MIDWAYSCENE

AT: B. Derek Shaw

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Chance Rides, LLC announced its return to the portable amusement ride market, reconnecting with the company's manufacturing heritage and decades-long legacy of innovation in the carnival and midway industry.

As part of this new chapter, Chance Rides is resuming production of some of its most iconic portable attractions, including the Zipper, the Pharaoh's Fury, the Freestyle and the Century Wheel. These rides have been staples on midways across the country and around the world and their return marks a renewed commitment to the traveling amusement sector.

"We're thrilled to return to the portable carnival market and back to our roots," said **Dr. Jay Aguilar**, global vice president of business development and marketing. "These rides represent the heart of our history, and this move reflects our passion for innovation, tradition, and the customers who helped build our legacy. We're excited for what's ahead."

The relaunch marks a new chapter for Chance, expanding on its already comprehensive lineup of park models and continuing its tradition of innovation with an eye toward the future.

The **International Association of Fairs and Expositions** (IAFE) recently announced eight members who were designated as Certified Fair Executives (CFE) during their 2025 management conference.

The individuals include **Michelle Butler, Minnesota State Fair**, Saint Paul; **Cheryl Flood, Florida State Fair**, Tampa; **Cheryle Hartley, Carolina Classic Fair**, Winston-Salem, North Carolina; **Cary Hester, Carolina Classic Fair**, Winston-Salem, North Carolina; **Casey Owen, Ozark Empire Fair**, Springfield, Missouri; **Abby Villas, Tennessee Valley Fair**, Knoxville; **Rhonda Ward, Collier Fair**, Naples, Florida and **Mindy Williamson, Iowa State Fair**, Des Moines.

The certification program provides incentives for professional improvement in fair management, recognizes those who achieve specific standards and develops professional status in the field of fair management. Certification also honors those members who have demonstrated their abilities through years of service to their fairs, fair associations, communities and the IAFE.

To earn the CFE designation, these individuals completed a rigorous certification process that included an application documenting professional experience and achievements, followed by a thorough review by the certification committee. A requirement to receive a CFE designation is that he/she is

also a graduate of the Institute of Fair Management.

In March, **The Jerome County Fair & Rodeo**, Jerome, Idaho, announced the hiring of new Fair Manager **Amanda Worthington**. She was born and raised in Jerome and brings a background in marketing, sponsorship outreach, public relations and event management.

From Worthington's Linked In page: "I am moving from one passion to another, military to hometown community. While the time I spent working with the gunfighters at the **Mountain Home Air Force Base** (Elmore County, southwestern Idaho) will always be close to my heart, I am looking forward to my new adventure. There's nothing like being home, your hometown fair and rodeo, and a community you love. Community and connection are two foundational elements I hold close personally and professionally. From data entry to 911 dispatch to marketing, my career has always involved helping the community and connecting them to additional resources."

The fair returns August 4-9 with **Brown's Amusements** handling the ride midway.

Matt "Cowboy" Buchanan is the first person to serve as full-time fair manager of the **Williamson County Fair**, Franklin, Tennessee. after serving in a part-time capacity last year. He is a seasoned leader in agricultural event management, bringing over 32 years of experience to his new role. Previously, Buchanan served as manager of the **WNC Agricultural Center and North Carolina Mountain State Fair**, Fletcher.

"The fair is part of the fabric of the Williamson County community and an event that families look forward to every year," said Buchanan. "I appreciate seeing a place like Williamson County — even with its significant growth — continue to pay homage to its agricultural roots. We are looking forward to making the 2025 fair bigger and better than ever."

The 21st Williamson County Fair will be held from August 1 through August 9, with **Amusement Midway Providers** supplying the carnival.

Three years from now, the 2028 **Los Angeles Olympics** cricket competition will be held in a temporary stadium at the 500-acre fairgrounds in Pomona, California. This was recently announced by **The International Cricket Council**. The competition at LA28 will feature six teams each in the men's and women's competition as the sport makes a return to the games after 128 years.

Fairplex, the name the complex is officially called, has hosted the **Los Angeles County Fair** since 1922.

►FESTIVAL

Continued from page 32



The Yo-Yo was among equipment provided by B & K Carnival. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



A Tempest was featured among the thrill rides at the festival. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



A rare King Rides Frolic attraction called G-Whiz was on the Brinkley Entertainment midway. AT/RON GUSTAFSON



This Allan Herschell helicopter ride was featured among the kiddie rides. AT/RON GUSTAFSON

WATER PARKS & RECREATION

► Norwegian Cruise Lines debuts Aqua Slidecoaster from Wiegand — page 38 / News Splash — page 38

Great Wolf Lodge Mashantucket opens near Connecticut casino

AT: Jeffrey Seifert

jseifert@amusementtoday.com

LEDYARD, Conn. — The newest lodge of the Great Wolf family held its grand opening on May 6, 2025, following a soft opening on April 25. The resort, located near **Foxwoods Resort Casino**, is in Mashantucket, a census-designated place that is home to the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation. The area is known for its history as one of the oldest Indian reservations in North America and for the tribe's significant economic contributions to the state.

Great Wolf Lodge Mashantucket is the 23rd lodge in the **Great Wolf Resorts** (GWR) portfolio. GWR partnered with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation to build the \$300 million resort next to the famous Foxwood Resorts Casino. The tribe is a federally recognized tribal government with sovereignty over its 1,635-acre Mashantucket (Western) Pequot Indian Reservation. Within their reservation, the tribe owns and operates the Foxwoods Casino, one of the largest in the world in terms of square footage.

Actress/comedian **Mindy Kaling** helped Great Wolf Lodge Mashantucket celebrate



Great Wolf Lodge Mashantucket (above) is across the parking lot from the Foxwoods Resort Casino. Although several slides protrude through the wall with the bulk of the structure located outside, **High Paw Holler** with its clear sections and the uphill portions of the **Rapid Racer** water coaster are inside the building (below). COURTESY GREAT WOLF RESORTS

its grand opening by riding water slides for charity. Kaling, a Cambridge, Massachusetts, native, participated in a "special water park challenge" to raise money for the **Make-A-Wish Foundation**. For every slide Kaling rode, Great Wolf Lodge donated \$4,000. Kaling rode all 13 of the new slides, raising a total of \$52,000.

This 23rd iteration is a first in the state of Connecticut. It represents the company's "next generation" Great Wolf Lodge resort experience that debuted last summer in Webster, Texas, and Naples, Florida. The 549-room lodge includes the requisite 92,000-square-foot Great Geyser Water Park for which Great Wolf Lodges are famous, along with a 60,000-square-foot Howlers Peak Adventure Park. The property boasts more than 7,500 square feet of conference space with built-in A/V technology and catering options.

Great Wolf Lodges are also

known for their eateries and guests here will find the familiar Fireside outdoor-themed full-service restaurant that serves up fire-cooked meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Other favorites include Wood's End Creamery for ice cream treats, Hungry Wolf Food Hall for pizzas, salads and pasta, Dunkin' for coffee specialties and pastries, Timbers Table & Kitchen for casual dining, Freshwoods market for grab-and-go meals, and Fatburger for custom-built burgers, fries, shakes, wings or a hot dog on a stick. Adults can imbibe at the Tidal Wave Bar, which features blended drinks, specialty cocktails, California wines, hard seltzers and an extensive roster of craft beers.

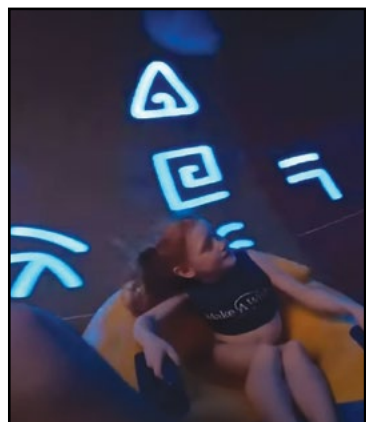
The lodge includes a number of new elements designed to enhance the family experience. Giant portals to and from the water and adventure parks usher guests into the fun. The grand lobby is lined with video screens that show different scenes throughout the day, and the indoor lighting changes to mirror the time of day from sunrise to



sunset. The grand lobby also serves as a hub for activities with a family-friendly ambiance, events throughout the day, nightly dance parties and the popular nighttime rendition of the Legend of Luna. During the tale of the enchanting fable, special lighting and video projections magically transform the entire lobby into an immersive storytelling experience. The new lobby design has more practical upgrades, too, like additional self-check kiosks.

At the heart of every Great Wolf experience is the water park. Once again, **ProSlide Technology**, with its long-standing partnership with GWR, provided the attrac-

tions. The primary slide tower holds seven large slides near the back of the park. Among the star attractions is **Rapid Racer**, a ProSlide dueling rocket blast with two-person rafts. Two family raft rides, **Pequot Plunge** and **River Canyon Run**, allow families to ride together in multi-person rafts. **Pequot Plunge** combines a **Tornado 24** with a **BehemothBowl 40** connected with enclosed tubes with colorful translucent sections interspersed with patterns. **River Canyon Run** is a long, enclosed mammoth that features translucent rune-like symbols along the walls of the tube. **Alberta Falls** is a one-



Rune-like symbols are seen as riders traverse the dark section of **River Canyon Run**. COURTESY GREAT WOLF RESORTS

► See WOLF, page 35



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►WOLF

Continued from page 34

or two-person tube slide with alternating white and blue sections. Forest Flume includes a clear section that rushes over a seating area below, offering interesting visuals. High Paw Holler includes two saucer sections as well as a clear section and includes some snappy turns with good G-forces.

In addition to the thrilling waterslides, the water park includes several family-friendly features commonly found at most Great Wolf Lodge locations, including Slap Tail Pond, a zero-depth entry wave pool with a maximum depth of five feet and gentle wave swells. Cyclone Cove offers in-water basketball play, and adjacent to the cove is Bigfoot Pass with a net crawl over floating lily pads along with floating otters and additional lily pads that kids can climb on. The Crooked Creek lazy river winds its way under many of the slide attractions. Otter Cave Waterworks is a RideHouse 400 water play structure that includes



The Grand Lobby has different lighting for daytime (above left) and nighttime (above right).
COURTESY GREAT WOLF RESORTS



four Twister body slides and a 600-gallon tipping bucket. A smaller water play area, Otter Springs, is a RideHouse 100 designed for younger guests under 52 inches.

While most come to a Great Wolf Resort to enjoy the water park, there are many “dry” offerings as well at the adventure park. Howlers Peak Ropes Course has adventurous guests ascending to various levels, balancing on ropes, crossing bridges, climbing through obstacles, and even traversing down a curved rail zipline. Those not wanting to harness up can climb and play on the multi-story

indoor playground, Howlers Peak Adventure Trail. Ten Paw Alley is a bowling alley that is designed to be family-friendly with smaller balls and shorter lanes. Unlike traditional bowling, no special shoes are required. At Oliver’s Mining Company, kids can pan and sift through a bag of dirt to uncover minerals and gemstones. Families can challenge each other to a round of miniature golf at the Howl in One Mini Golf course. For incredible electronic games, the kids will want to spend time at the Northern Lights Arcade, and when the kids get tired, the adults can move in as the

arcade is open 24 hours.

Great Wolf’s own **MagiQuest** interactive adventure game is a staple at every resort and turns the lodge into a live-action game where adventurers set off on a quest utilizing a magic wand with special powers.

The Virtual Frontier offers a variety of experiences, including a futuristic game of dodgeball or a trek among the dinosaurs. The latest VR addition, **MagiQuest: Powers & Puzzles**, lets families test their Magi mettle as they solve puzzles, unlock powers and create magical mayhem within **MagiQuest’s** Whispering

Woods.

Admission to the indoor water park is included with a resort stay. Within the last few years, many Great Wolf Lodge properties have offered day passes to guests not staying at the resort. Currently day passes are not available at the Mashantucket resort. Although the Lodge is adjacent to the Foxwoods Casino Resorts, it is operated independently. Guests staying at Great Wolf do not earn Foxwoods Rewards, nor can reward points be used to book a stay at the lodge.

Great Wolf Lodge offers another family-friendly alternative for visitors to the area who may not be interested in gambling. In addition to the casino, Ledyard is home to the **Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center** and the **HighFlyer Zipline**. The city is just a few miles from the Connecticut coastline and the village of Mystic, home to the famous **Mystic Seaport Museum**, **Mystic Aquarium**, **Olde Mystic Village** and — for **Julia Roberts** fans — **Mystic Pizza**.



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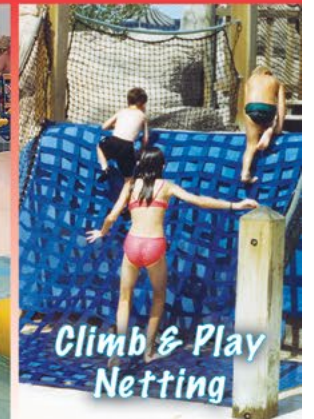
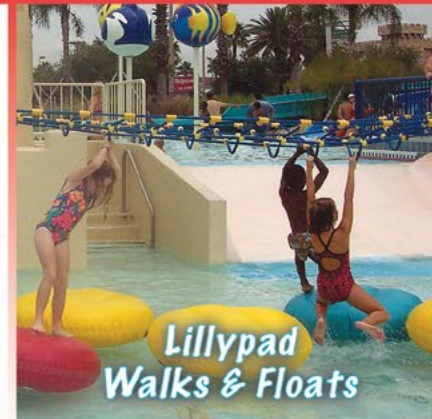
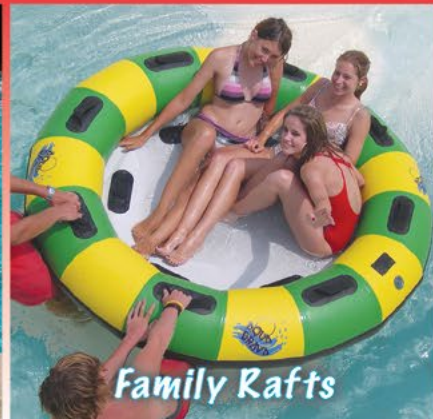


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Guests board the Aqua Slidecoaster on deck 18 and are launched up to deck 20 before entering the 600-foot-long slide. COURTESY NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE

Norwegian Cruise Lines debuts a Wiegand Aqua Slidecoaster

MIAMI, Fla. — The newest ship in the **Norwegian Cruise Line** (NCL) family made its debut on April 26, 2025, from its home base of Port Canaveral following a trans-Atlantic crossing to New York City and the official christening at NCL's North American base in Miami. The Norwegian Aqua, the third ship in the cruise line's Prima Class, includes the world's first launched watercoaster from **Wiegand.Waterrides**. Unlike other uphill coasters, which utilize water jets or linear induction motors to propel rafts uphill, the Wiegand ride uses an arm to push the rafts uphill. The concept was first presented six years ago, with a model of the slide displayed at IAAPA Expo 2019.

The Slidecoaster provides a launch start that replaces the need for lift hills or boarding stations located at the top of tall towers accessed by staircases. The specially designed rafts seat two guests each and have a sturdy back behind the rear seat. A sled trolley on roller coaster track has an arm that is used to push the raft forward to a top speed of 50 km/h (31 mph). Guests are first weighed to ensure they don't exceed the ride's weight limit of 300 pounds per guest or 400 pounds combined for two guests. The slidecoaster is two separate slides, and guests line up on either the left or the right of the launch mechanism. After boarding, the raft is moved forward via a conveyor belt into the launch position. The launch mechanism is positioned between the two slides on a roller coaster track and has arms extending left and right with a mechanism that connects to the back of the raft.

As riders are moved forward, they go under the arm and the pusher mechanism. Once in place, the arms move forward and engage the back of the rafts — one on each side, while the rafts are still moving up the conveyor. A thin sheet of water flowing down the slide reduces the friction so the rafts can slide uphill. After contacting the back of the raft, LSMs propel the launch mechanism — and with it the pair of rafts — up the waterslide. Upon reaching the top, the launch mechanism stops, and the rafts continue on their way inside the enclosed waterslide tubes, careening from side to side as they negotiate turns and spirals inside the colorful 600-foot-long tubes. The enclosed tubes include special lighting effects in the form of translucent dots and striped patterns. At two points along the slide, the upper half of the slide is completely clear, allowing riders to see outside of the tube. The two tubes follow a similar course but are not identical. Following the splashdown, the rafts float in the channel, returning to the original launch point where guests disembark. The rafts never have to leave the trough.

Although the Prima class comprises the newest ships of the NCL fleet, they are not the largest. NCL's Epic, Breakaway and Breakaway Plus classes have the largest ships, but the last of the Breakaway Plus class, Norwegian Encore, launched in 2019. The Norwegian Prima (2022) and Viva (2023) were famous for their multi-level speedway (go-kart) courses. Aqua's Slidecoaster takes the place of the speedway course. Three more Prima-class ships are scheduled to enter service over the next three years. NCL has indicated that the upcoming Norwegian Luna (2026) will have a Slidecoaster.

—Jeffrey Seifert



NEWS SPLASH

AT: Jeffrey L. Seifert
jseifert@amusementtoday.com

When **Carowinds' Carolina Harbor Waterpark** opened for the season last month, adult guests were welcomed to enjoy the new Carolina Harbor Shore Club. The new adults-only section features Charlotte's first swim-up bar, called Paul Metto's Boathouse Bar. The 27,280-square-foot area offers a sophisticated retreat away from the park's main attractions and includes a 3,577-square-foot pool; 58 shaded chaise lounge chairs; six luxury cabanas with a TV, mini-fridge and dedicated concierge service; and a lawn area with poolside games.

"There's a lot of excitement for Carolina Harbor Shore Club," said **Brian Oerding**, Carowinds park manager. "It's the first time we've provided an elevated, adults-only experience. We expect it will become a new guest favorite, adding value to our season pass and providing an oasis for our adult guests looking to enjoy summer in style."

Entry to Carolina Harbor Waterpark is included with general admission to Carowinds.

The **Okana Resort** in Oklahoma City opened its outdoor adventure lagoon the week leading up to Memorial Day weekend. The resort, which opened on February 21, had been operating with its 100,000-square-foot indoor water park while the 200,000-square-foot outdoor lagoon received finishing touches. The outdoor adventure area was open May 17 to 23 just for resort guests, then beginning Saturday, May 24, visitors with day passes could access the outdoor park.

"We have 100% occupancy for a while," said **Dan Boren**, secretary of commerce, Chickasaw Nation. "The successful completion of this project — the magnitude of Okana — is a testament to the extensive collaboration, unwavering dedication and meticulous attention to detail of numerous individuals and partners."

Six Flags White Water in Marietta, Georgia, is adding a new luxury rental experience called Cabana Village.

Each cabana accommodates up to 10 people and includes a television, dedicated concierge service, private access to the Little Hooch Lazy River, shaded seating, personal lockers and views of the Atlanta Ocean Wave Pool.

The park has also added food and beverage offerings, including handspun milkshakes, freshly baked cookies, and a new signature pizza.

The park also repainted the popular Tornado waterslide.

The **Adventure Cove Waterpark** at **Resorts World Sentosa** (RWS) in Singapore temporarily became a Gaga-themed wonderland during **Lady Gaga's** shows at the National Stadium. The American pop star's only shows in Asia were at the Singapore National Stadium on May 18, 19, 21 and 24.

The event, called Monster Splash, in reference to her fan base called Little Monsters, ran through May 25. During those days, DJs played Lady Gaga hits at the pool party and a dance performance, Aqua-Cadabra, was held at the water park's BluWater Bay.

Guests could also order themed food and drinks, like the chocolate treat Glamour Glam Cake Pops as well as the Sour Fame Mocktail and Red Carpet Refresher.

Monster Splash was part of Monster Experiences, an RWS-wide Lady Gaga-themed celebration of her return to Singapore after 13 years.

Construction has begun on **Point Surf Park** in Fellsmere, Florida. The Point is set to make waves in 2026 using **Endless Surf** with its next-generation wave pool technology.

The Point will be anchored by Endless Surf's ES36 technology, renowned for its powerful pneumatic hardware and innovative software suite. The ES36 will offer customizable and powerful waves suitable for surfers ranging from novice surfers to professionals. The wave technology can generate waves from two to seven feet and offer rides of up to 19 seconds when in single peak configuration and up to 11 seconds in split peak. In addition, Endless Surf's heart-shaped design creates a dynamic beach environment that can accommodate various skill levels simultaneously while also offering great views for spectators to enjoy along the beachfront and the backwall.

Construction on the Endless Surf lagoon is well underway with site grading and pile installation already complete and excavation beginning in the coming weeks.

As the state's first surf park and the USA's first Endless Surf lagoon, The Point Surf Park is set to satiate the region's demand for waves on command and ignite further interest in surfing for beginners and newcomers to the sport.

The park is located on a 10.5-acre site in Indian River County, in a prime location between Florida's Treasure Coast and Space Coast — two regions deeply rooted in surf culture, which draw millions of visitors annually.

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BUSINESS & NEWSMAKERS

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IAAPA Honors welcomes members from around the globe for event

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

RUST, Germany — For the second year, IAAPA has invited its members to a special celebration to bestow numerous Brass Ring Awards. Called IAAPA Honors, the 2025 edition was hosted by globally renowned super park **Europa-Park** and its resort.

“Going to Europa-Park was definitely the right decision,” said IAAPA President **Jakob Wahl**. “When we launched this idea two years ago with IAAPA’s board of directors, we wanted to make these awards truly global, as IAAPA is a global destination. It should be traveling and be in those regions and give them a chance to attend a large-scale experience.”

The three-day event took place April 28 – 30. Many activities were held within **Hotel Colosseo**, which included awards presentations and speakers engaging attendees with subjects such as AI, togetherness and well-



The closing night was a gala extravaganza with dinner, live entertainment and the final achievement awards. Pictured above left is Herschend Family Entertainment’s Gina Claassen accepting an Individual Achievement Service Award from IAAPA Chairman Massi Freddi. In addition to indoor presentations, evening socials allowed for engaging networking with great weather all week (above right). AT/TIM BALDWIN



ness, new attraction projects, food and beverage, guest behavior and sustainability.

The kick-off presentation was a fireside chat with **Roland Mack** and **Jürgen Mack** discussing the park’s 50-year history.

Tours were also a part of the event, with available visits to **Mack Rides**, **Eatrenalin**, **Rulantica** and

an overview of Europa-Park. Evening receptions helped carry the flavor of the resort on Monday and Tuesday, but a grand dinner show on the final night mixed the remaining achievement awards with delicious food and vibrant entertainment. Going into the wee hours, it was a celebration to remember. Throughout the tours

and at one evening reception, a handful of the park’s spectacular rides were made available.

Awards were given for excellence in the fields of Human Resources, Entertainment, Food and Beverage, Games and Merchandise, Marketing and Sustainability. All recipients of the Brass Ring Awards can

be found at iaapa.org.

Because of the magnitude of everything Europa-Park has to offer, numerous attendees arrived early or stayed additional time to take in what the award-winning park and resort truly have to offer.

“Last year in Vegas, we said, ‘Let’s do it somewhere where many people want to go to where everyone can be inspired and there is something for everyone.’ We knew Europa-Park would be a fantastic host, and so they were,” Wahl told *Amusement Today*. “We didn’t want to only give out awards. We wanted people to have the opportunity to learn from those awards and see them in action here. While we give out Brass Rings for entertainment, sustainability and HR, we also offer tours here to see how they are active in this space. That’s a wonderful way of bringing things together.”

•iaapa.org



IAAPA President Jakob Wahl welcomes attendees inside Europa-Park’s Hotel Colosseo. AT/TIM BALDWIN



Greeting members on the first day were (l to r) Chip and Kathy Cleary (Europa-Park), Amanda Thompson (Blackpool Pleasure Beach) and Marianne and Roland Mack (Europa-Park). AT/TIM BALDWIN

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HWINS.com/partner

Morgan's initiatives expanded with Inclusion Institute, Studios

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

SAN ANTONIO — Celebrating its 15th anniversary on May 21, **Morgan's Wonderland** has grown far beyond the theme park. In following years, the campus expanded with **Morgan's Inspiration Island** and nearby **Morgan's Camp**. **Morgan's Sports** and the **Multi-Assistance Center (MAC)** also came online. With a hotel on the way, it would seem as if the momentum showed no signs of stopping.

At IAAPA Expo 2024 in Orlando, **Gordon Hartman**, founder of Morgan's, officially launched **Morgan's Inclusion Institute**.

The Institute educates and empowers businesses, organizations and government entities, among others, to integrate inclusion and accessibility into every facet of their work and daily lives. The goal is for those qualities to become second nature in the development of new and existing projects.

"Morgan's has unofficial-



Groups and organizations can receive inclusivity training (above). In the future, a building (inset) will house the Institute. COURTESY MORGAN'S

ly provided guidance in several aspects of our community for many years. We are proud to have formalized that work last year with the launch of Morgan's Inclusion Institute," said **Dr. Brent Fields**, CEO of Morgan's. "Embracing the 'Morgan's Way,' the Institute will set a standard of excellence for fostering a more inclusive world and sparking cultural change."

The Institute has consulted with the **San Antonio International Airport** on its expansion project.

Through its program, the

Institute can empower learners to implement meaningful changes through various aspects of the program:

- Disability inclusion training
- Scalable plans for customized approaches to specific needs
- Project consultation and certifications

"Anyone who has an interest in creating a more accessible space, we are happy to consult with them," said **Mary Martinez Worth**, chief marketing officer.

In March, **Morgan's**



erness" between people of all walks of life. The host is **Leslie Mouton**, who serves as creative media director for Morgan's. The Emmy-award-winning journalist has 35 years of broadcast experience and gained national recognition after going public with her breast cancer battle 24 years ago, a time when speaking about breast cancer wasn't as openly accepted.

"We try to tell stories of successes and new things within our entities," Worth told *Amusement Today*. "But this is a broader picture. We wanted to highlight other people's successes and not just Morgan's. One of our local TV stations partnered with us to help promote it. In time, we would like to make that a revenue source. The idea is with more eyeballs, with more people who subscribe, we hope the revenue will help support all our entities."

Episode topics range from people with disabilities starting their own businesses to service animals to sign language.

Studio was the latest initiative introduced under the Morgan's umbrella. Morgan's has its own YouTube channel, and segments of *Inclusion Unlimited* are already being viewed.

"This will help cultivate an inclusive mindset among audiences around the world," said Fields.

Each episode of *Inclusion Unlimited* is less than 10 minutes. Currently, the marketing team produces all segments. Like everything the Morgan's philosophy upholds, the segments carry a sense of "togeth-

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3dx Scenic succeeds in aiding U.S. theme parks enhancing experience

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

CINCINNATI, Ohio — Custom fabrication firm **3dx Scenic** has created thematic experiences since it was founded in 1999. In autumn of 2023, the company became an independent fabrication studio under the new ownership of **Mark Rosenzweig**, chief business officer, and **Matt Waldenmeyer**, chief operating officer.

While the company works beyond the amusement industry, there are many clients in the theme park world, and 3dx strives to help them meet the spring demands of new attractions.

"For most of our projects, it is a similar schedule to that of the manufacturers, where we are delivering in February, March, April," said Rosenzweig. "This spring, we had three installations happening concurrently in one week. I wouldn't advise anyone to go through that, but it was just the way things timed out. But we make it happen."

In 2025, numerous theme parks have had their facilities enhanced with sculptural additions.

"A big project for us was in Ocean City, New Jersey," noted Waldenmeyer. "**Playland's Castaway Cove** suffered a fire a few years back. I'm from New Jersey, so I had been there before. To be able to do something so iconic in 'my old stomping grounds' was really neat."

"It was humbling,"



Playland's Castaway Cove sees the return of its iconic showpiece (above). New portals into the themed areas are a refresh to Holiday World (below left). 3dx provided new portal signage for the The Plaza at Silver Dollar City (below right). COURTESY 3DX SCENIC, HOLIDAY WORLD



admitted Rosenzweig. "It had iconic status, and when the park had that tragic fire that burned the arcade building down with the ship, this was on the plan to replace it. A company was doing drone footage as we were doing the install, and all that footage went all over social media and everyone was loving it. That was gratifying."

"We created three new portals for **Holiday World & Splashin' Safari**," Waldenmeyer told

Amusement Today. "For me, it was a great project for a great group of people. To be trusted to replace fixtures that had been in the park for so long and working with them from the design phase to installation was really fulfilling."

"I echo that," added Rosenzweig. "The park's vision is more toward theming and immersiveness. That started last year with creating the Stuffing Springs land within Thanksgiving. Whether you are riding or not, it was a joy to be in that area."

Holiday World opened as Santa Claus Land. When it branched out into the various holidays in 1984, it created signage portals into each land. After four decades, the new versions are an aesthetic upgrade.

"The portals turned 40 last year, and while our team kept them up nicely, they were most likely not intended to last this long," said **Lauren Crosby**, fourth-generation owner and director of entertainment and events. "Reimagining

the holiday portals has been on our project list for years, but the time finally came that we would need to completely rebuild. Our only choice was whether to directly copy the old designs or start from the drawing board. We decided it was time to do something new and turned to 3dx to find something timeless and whimsical. They absolutely delivered!"

"They look so dynamic and have lighting embedded into them, so as the park continues to expand its operating schedule, which will include later operating hours, I think the new portals will serve as a great asset," noted Rosenzweig.

"Halloween is my favorite — the ghosts are super cute, the bats in the letters are a great detail, and the colors are perfect!" said Crosby. "We wanted to make sure that the new portals paid homage to our old ones but had a flair of their own and 3dx helped us achieve that goal. We've already heard from many that they love the new designs and love the way we're keeping the

park updated. When you're nearly 80 years old, there's always something that needs repainting or rebuilding, but we don't see that as a problem — we see it as an opportunity to refresh and reimagine."

Dollywood received a Hollywood-esque sign that mimicked the famed letters California tourists see while traveling within the Los Angeles Basin.

"In a 1982 television interview, **Dolly [Parton]** said she dreamed of building a place to capture and celebrate the spirit of her Smoky Mountain home. Months later, a meeting between Dolly and the owners of **Silver Dollar City Tennessee** was arranged by the park's general manager and Dolly's bus driver," said **Wes Ramey**, public relations, Dollywood. "While in Hollywood, Dolly was thinking about a name for her new Smoky Mountain theme park. She saw the Hollywood sign and thought to herself, 'Hollywood, Dollywood. Well, Dollywood sounds good to me!' And that's how Dollywood got its name!"

In the mid-1980s, such letters were placed at the construction site for promotional purposes. Now, new letters have a permanent home.

In Branson, **Silver Dollar City's** new plaza that connects The Fire District with Grand Exposition also received signage.

Once theme park projects are up and running, 3dx has corporate projects and architecture firms to keep things in continuous flow. "Things happen all year. It isn't quite like selling roller coasters," said Rosenzweig.

Currently, 3dxScenic is in talks for larger-scale installations for parks in 2026. "They need to go into production in the next month or two," noted Rosenzweig. "We're excited for the prospects. 2025 was both exhausting and rewarding in our run to the finish line for the spring projects. We're kind of relishing in that now and looking forward to the future."

•3dxscenic.com



Hollywood style letters now have their place on a hillside in **Dollywood**. COURTESY DOLLYWOOD

Roller Coaster Museum saves, preserves four historic coaster cars

PLAINVIEW, Texas — The **National Roller Coaster Museum and Archives** (NRCMA) successfully raised the funds to save and preserve four historic coaster cars from across North America, all thanks to ride enthusiasts from around the world.

The vehicles that fans helped the museum rescue from the scrapyard were Kingda Ka — retired as the tallest coaster in the world — from **Six Flags Great Adventure**, Nighthawk — the world's first flying coaster — from **Carowinds**, La Vibora — last "Swiss Bob" in operation — from **Six Flags Over Texas** and Time Warp — a **Zamperla** Volare coaster — from **Canada's Wonderland**.

"The incredible outpouring of support from coaster enthusiasts around the world is both humbling and inspiring," said **Jeff Novotny**, president of the NRCMA. "We very much look forward to rewarding their efforts by having them come out to see their contributions in action."

Park fans and the general public are invited to get up close and personal with the vehicles they helped save, along with many other historic coaster artifacts at "Back to the Museum," July 26, a preview event for roller coaster enthusiasts and park fans.

•rollercoastermuseum.org



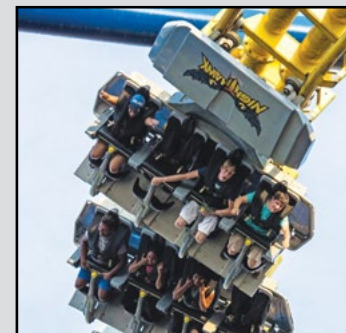
Time Warp, Canada's Wonderland.
COURTESY NRCMA



La Vibora, Six Flags Over Texas. COURTESY NRCMA



Kingda Ka, Six Flags Great Adventure.
COURTESY NRCMA



Nighthawk, Carowinds.
COURTESY NRCMA

ON THE MOVE

RWS Global has announced two strategic leadership appointments as part of its continued global expansion. **Hans Vollrath** joins as executive vice president of land production, while **Ashley Hong** steps into the newly created role of vice president of licensing. These additions emphasize the company's commitment to delivering world-class experiences and setting the standard in live entertainment globally.



Vollrath



Hong

"Bringing Hans on as our EVP, Land Production is a game-changer," stated **Jake McCoy**, chief operating officer at RWS Global. "His vision, drive and influential background in themed entertainment are exactly what we need as we scale upwards."

With more than 30 years of experience delivering world-class productions and guest experiences, Vollrath will lead and expand RWS Global's land-based entertainment portfolio, including theatrical productions, theme park shows, immersive experiences, seasonal activations, branded attractions and events. Before joining RWS Global, he served as general manager at **Meow Wolf**, overseeing daily operations and full P&L responsibilities.

Hong previously served as global merchandising group manager for Asia Pacific at the **National Basketball Association** (NBA), where she spearheaded the strategic retail expansion of the brand, notably identifying and negotiating with strategic partners to develop **NBA Lifestyle** stores throughout the APAC region, which significantly enhanced brand visibility and fan engagement.

"We are thrilled to welcome Ashley to our team," said **Veronica Hart**, chief growth officer at RWS Global. "Her passion for fandom, her expertise in global brand strategy and her deep knowledge of the licensing industry will be invaluable assets as we expand our offerings globally and strengthen our position in the market."

The Resorts Companies, Inc. announced the appointment of **John Alvarez** as general counsel. In this key leadership role, Alvarez will oversee all legal matters for The Resorts Companies and support ongoing strategic expansion initiatives at **Massanutten Resort** and **Wilderness Presidential Resort**.

"John's appointment is a reflection of our commitment to thoughtful growth and the long-term strength of our organization," said **Steve Krohn**, president and chief operating officer of The Resorts Companies. "As we continue to grow and diversify, John's expertise in managing acquisitions, development and complex transactions will be essential in helping us execute on our strategic vision."

A seasoned real estate and development legal executive, Alvarez has more than 25 years of experience specializing in timeshare, mixed-use and residential projects. Prior to joining The Resorts Companies, Alvarez served as vice president of acquisitions and development for **Holiday Inn Club Vacations**, working closely with executive leadership to execute the company's growth plan and lead significant expansion across domestic and international markets.

The **State Fair of Texas** Board of Directors has appointed **Gilbert Gerst** as its new chairman of the board during their annual meeting for the nonprofit organization. Gilbert succeeds **Bruce Sifford** following the completion of his three-year term. By accepting this position, Gilbert continues the legacy of the many distinguished community leaders who have provided leadership for the State Fair of Texas since its original charter was established in 1886.



Alvarez



Gerst

Gerst has served on the volunteer board of directors for the State Fair of Texas for the past 17 years. In addition, Gilbert currently serves as the fair's chair of the Finance and Audit Committee and has previously served on the fair's Chairman's Task Force and Advisory Board.

"Gilbert has been dedicated to the State Fair of Texas and its mission since 2008, and we are thrilled to see him step into his new role as board chairman," said State Fair of Texas President **Mitchell Gieber**. "Gilbert brings a wealth of knowledge to the table through his experiences, and his steadfast support of the State Fair of Texas ensures the future of our organization is in good hands."

North American Midway Entertainment (NAME) announced the appointment of **Dan Sawyer** as its new director of business development.

"We are thrilled to welcome Dan to the NAME family," said NAME President and CEO **Danny Huston**. "His ability to connect people, brands and experiences in meaningful ways will help us deepen our relationships with partners and bring new opportunities to the communities we serve."

Prior to joining NAME, Sawyer served as senior director of accounts and business development at **Agency GWL**, a full-service firm based in Little Rock, Arkansas. Under his leadership, the agency delivered some of the largest fairs in the **Arkansas State Fair's** 84-year history and managed a portfolio of more than 50 clients across nine states. His creative campaigns and strategic direction helped generate over \$7.5 million in new business.

In addition to his agency work, Sawyer is the founder of **ProFusion Marketing**, a nationally recognized sponsorship consulting firm that has raised over \$18 million for fairs and festivals since its inception in 2002.



Sawyer

Legacy

SHARING

As the self-described caretaker of his community's park, **Steve Gorman** compares a visit to **Waldameer & Water World** as "attending a party in our home." Celebrating its 129th season, Gorman is proud to guide the family-owned park and inspire today's young workforce.

Gorman provides first roles and a generational approach

ERIE, Pa. — Even with thirty years of experience at Waldameer Park & Water World, Steve Gorman says he still feels he's an anomaly in the industry.

"I did not start my career in parks," he said. "I'm an engineer by trade, and that's the path I was on for 10 years before I joined Waldameer. My wife grew up at Waldameer, and you could say I watched from the sidelines for six years before officially transitioning to the park full-time."

Shifting his career path to operate a regional park was a big change for Gorman. "Immediately, I began to interview teens looking for their first jobs. I discovered that hiring them was just the first step. They did not come to the park knowing what to do. We had to teach them every aspect of their role, as well as instill our company values and expectations in them. From teaching them how to properly use a broom, to working with the public, I discovered my role was more than my first employer. It was so to serve as their mentor and leader."

"I had an incredible mentor when I entered this industry," Gorman shared. "When I first started with the park, my father-in-law, Paul (Nelson), worked closely with me. He taught me the 'Waldameer Way.' We even shared a partner desk in the office, which allowed me to watch and learn alongside him. He knew every aspect of the park and he exposed me to everything."

'Everything' described — and continues to — Gorman's day-to-day responsibilities as park president. However, he says the rides and maintenance teams remain his favorites.

"Everything about park operations was new to me," he explained. "As I learned our rides, I also learned about others by visiting parks around the state and

getting to know the people who ran them."

At first, Gorman was surprised by the camaraderie from other parks. "Waldameer has a shared connection with other family-owned parks," he said. "I was struck by the continued willingness to help that lives in this supportive community. Even though we are competitors, we are also part of a special niche: we provide safe places for families to visit together. I don't think any other industry so openly shares and assists across company lines the way this one does."

His family's business is special to many more than just Gorman. "Waldameer is a community park," he continued. "Our guests' grandparents visited when they were young. Later they brought their children, who are now visiting with their children. We have a responsibility to provide a safe, affordable, memorable experience for the generations of guests who come here."

"Paul did not think of Waldameer as his park; he thought of it as belonging to the community, and he was the caretaker. That sentiment remains. We want our guests to know this is their park, and we take great pride in maintaining that legacy."

With a year-round team of 25, Waldameer's employee base substantially increases each summer.

"I am a hands-on leader," Gorman shared. "I believe a good leader succeeds by doing. I will not ask anyone to do something I won't do myself. If your team sees you working and observes you helping others, they are more likely to support you and give their best. We learn from invested leaders."

"Giving someone their first job is so rewarding," he added. "I am often randomly stopped by someone who tells me their first

Steve Gorman

Waldameer & Water World

Erie, Pennsylvania



job was at Waldameer. 'You taught me how to work,' they say. 'You helped me learn how to interact with others. My work ethic comes from Waldameer.' Even if that person only worked with us for one summer, knowing we helped shape their perspective and outlook means a great deal."

"During training, we encourage our employees to approach each day at Waldameer in the same manner they would welcome guests to their own home," Gorman shared. "We ask what they need to do to prepare for a party. Should they greet people as they arrive? How will they interact with them throughout the party? This example helps our employees get in the mindset of providing a clean park where people feel welcome and safe. A visit to Waldameer is a visit to our house."

While Gorman says that the formula sounds simple, he also acknowledges not everyone comes from a traditional home, and that's where training and communication fill the gaps.

"Not everyone has a backyard where they learned to rake leaves," he said. "Not everyone has been shown how to sweep a floor or clean counters. We have a special opportunity and responsibility with this generation. We are teachers, not just a summer employer."

Amidst the hustle and bustle of park operations, Gorman has a favorite place at the park. "There is no better view than at the top of our wooden coaster, the Ravine Flyer II," he said. "It's 85 feet tall and the hill stands above the tree line. I can see ice fishermen in the winter and sailboats in the summer. I like to find calm moments there."

"People's lives are busy and filled with options for entertainment," he concluded. "When our guests choose to spend their time at Waldameer Park, we must treat them right. We provide a variety of rides, games and food, all in one safe place, along with our brand of customer service. If we keep that focus, we will remain our community's park for another 129 years."

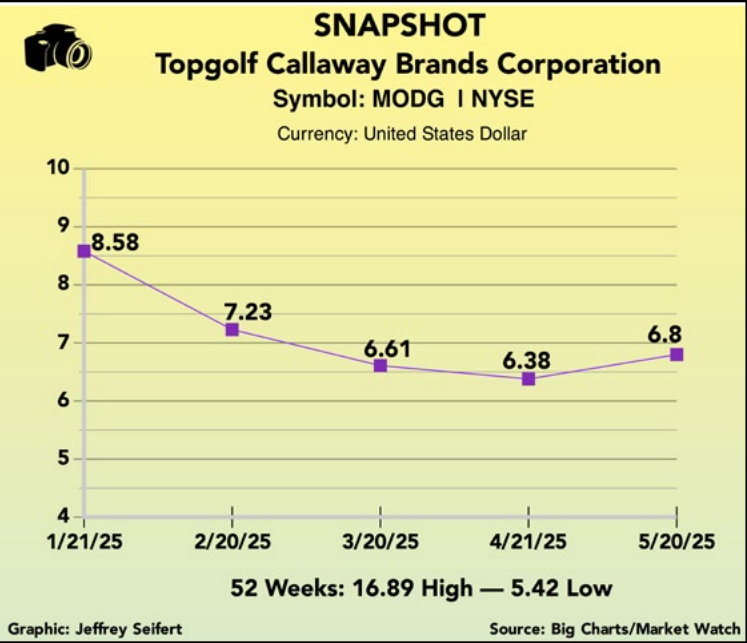
—Susan Storey

MARKET WATCH

COMPANY	SYMBOL	MARKET	PRICE 5/19/25	HIGH 52-Week	LOW 52-Week
PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS					
The Blackstone Group	BX	NYSE	145.45	200.96	115.66
Comcast Corp./ NBCUniversal Media	CMCSA	NASDAQ	35.44	45.31	31.44
Dave & Busters Entertainment, LLC	PLAY	NASDAQ	21.31	52.73	15.08
EPR Properties	EPR	NYSE	54.05	54.25	39.87
Falcon's Beyond	FBYD	NASDAQ	6.92	13.25	3.62
Fuji Kyoko Co., Ltd.	JP:9010	TYO	2078.00	3235.00	1972.00
Haichang Holdings Ltd.	HK:2255	SEHK	0.75	1.04	0.39
Leofoo Development Co.	TW:2705	TSEC	18.45	21.60	14.80
Lucky Strike Entertainment Corp	LUCK	NYSE	9.12	14.92	7.66
MGM Resorts International	MGM	NYSE	33.67	47.26	25.30
Parks America, Inc.	PRKA	OTC	0.39	0.48	0.35
Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd.	RCL	NYSE	254.03	277.08	130.08
Six Flags Entertainment Corp.	FUN	NYSE	37.09	58.70	28.02
Tivoli A/S	DK:TIV	CSE	620.00	728.00	586.00
United Parks & Resorts Inc.	PRKS	NYSE	49.39	60.83	37.68
The Walt Disney Company	DIS	NYSE	112.66	118.63	80.10
Warner Bros Discovery Inc.	WBD	NASDAQ	9.05	12.70	6.64
SUPPLIERS/OTHERS					
Brogent Technologies, Inc.	TW:5263	TSEC	108.50	205.50	82.00
Sansei Technologies, Inc.	TYO:6357	TYO	1440.00	1852.00	1031.00
Topgolf Callaway Brands	MODG	NYSE	6.57	16.89	5.42
Details and information available at amusementtoday.com/stocks					

Worldwide Markets — CSE/DK: Copenhagen Stock Exchange; HK: The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong; JP: The Tokyo Stock Exchange; NASDAQ: National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations; NYSE: New York Stock Exchange; OCT: Over -the-counter stocks; TAIEX: The Taiwan Capitalization Weighted Stock Index; TYO: The Tokyo Stock Exchange; TW: The Taiwan Stock Exchange.

—SOURCES: Bigcharts.com



DIESEL PRICES		
Region (U.S)	As of 5/19/25	Change from 1 year ago
East Coast	\$3.580	(\$0.315)
Midwest	\$3.481	(\$0.204)
Gulf Coast	\$3.201	(\$0.289)
Mountain	\$3.512	(\$0.234)
West Coast	\$3.828	(\$0.184)
California	\$4.835	(\$0.214)

CURRENCY	
On 5/20/25 \$1 USD =	
0.8904	EURO
0.7492	GBP (British Pound)
144.99	JPY (Japanese Yen)
0.8344	CHF (Swiss Franc)
1.5534	AUD (Australian Dollar)
1.3953	CAD (Canadian Dollar)

BUSINESS WATCH

Falcon's Beyond acquires OES

ORLANDO — **Falcon's Beyond Global, Inc.** has acquired **Oceaneering Entertainment Systems (OES)**, a division of **Oceaneering International Inc.**

In the transaction, Falcon's purchased OES's global portfolio of patented technologies, proprietary engineering and manufacturing processes. Falcon's also assumed the lease for a more than 106,000-square-foot facility to bolster Falcon's research, development, testing and integration services. In addition, Falcon's has hired key members of OES' highly experienced team. Falcon's also has an option to acquire certain OES inventory exercisable on or before July 23, 2025. The transaction follows a letter of intent previously announced on November 19, 2024, with Falcon's, rather than **Infinite Acquisitions Partners LLC**, making the purchase.

"The powerful combination of Falcon's innovation with OES's technical and engineering expertise is a game changer," said **Cecil D. Magpuri**, CEO and co-founder of Falcon's Beyond. "OES has been behind some of the best attractions and experiences in the world. Together, we're ushering in a new era for the global experience economy."

Going forward, Falcon's will provide support for all legacy OES products, ensuring continuity with the same personnel and technology that was provided by OES as the original equipment manufacturer (OEM).

United Parks & Resorts reports first quarter

ORLANDO — **United Parks & Resorts Inc.** reported its financial results for the first quarter of 2025.

"We are pleased to report another quarter of strong financial results," said **Marc Swanson**, chief executive officer of United Parks & Resorts Inc. "Results in the first quarter were negatively impacted by the timing of Easter and Spring Break holidays moving into the second quarter this year compared to being in the first quarter last year. Despite the negative calendar shift, in-park per capita spending increased 1.1% during the first quarter to a record level and has now grown for 19 of the last 20 quarters. First quarter results were also impacted by certain timing related impacts that resulted in over five million dollars more of certain expenses being recorded in the first quarter of 2025 compared to the first quarter of 2024. We are also pleased to report that April 2025 attendance was up 8.1% compared to April 2024."

Attendance was 3.4 million guests, a decrease of approximately 59,000 guests or 1.7% from the first quarter of 2024. Total revenue was \$286.9 million, a decrease of \$10.5 million or 3.5% from the first quarter of 2024. Net loss was \$16.1 million, a decrease of \$4.9 million from the first quarter of 2024.

SBI Americas partners with PB Amusement

MECHANICSBURG, Pa. — After securing new notable customers including **Cherry Crest Adventure Farm** and **Knoebels Amusement Resort**, **SBI Americas LLC** — a U.S. subsidiary of **SBI Sweden** — recently opened an Orlando-area warehouse to better serve U.S. customers. As part of this expansion, the company has announced it will now be represented in the U.S. by **PB Amusement**.

"I am very proud of the progress we have made the past year, and I see unlimited potential in the U.S. Our miniature vehicles ranging from cars of different kinds to trucks, tractors, boats and construction-themed machinery equipment for children are poised for strong growth over the next several years," said **Morgan Cederblom**, CEO, SBI Americas.

"I am excited to be representing SBI in the Americas and sharing their high-quality, battery-powered mini vehicles and kiddie rides with PB Amusement's customers," added **Peter Barto**, CEO of PB Amusement, LLC.



SAFETY, MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

► Revamped Mind Eraser opens — page 51 / GCII's Titan Track smooths nine coasters — page 52

Kemah Boardwalk: refurbishment, solutions enhance 2025 season

AT: Tim Baldwin

tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

KEMAH, Texas — Perched on an inlet of the Gulf of Mexico, **Kemah Boardwalk** is a year-round operation. Owned and operated by **Landry's**, the area is a mixed-recreation development of restaurants, amusement rides, a hotel and **The Aquarium**. Its seaside location makes it picturesque yet at the same time creates its harsh conditions.

The star attraction is the Boardwalk Bullet roller coaster.

"Every year we go through a whole survey of the track. We take accelerometer readings three times a year," said **Jacob Bigger**, general manager. "We compare the readings to the last ones and see what changes there are in the track. Those readings give us our G forces in all three directions: up and down, front to back and side to side. We're able to physically go survey the track in those areas and see what changed."

Bigger says in so doing, the Boardwalk has essen-

tially retracked the entire coaster over the last handful of seasons.

"In the previous year, we put a whole new control system on," he told *Amusement Today*. "The ride was put in in 2007, and technology changes. Things become obsolete with PLC. To avoid any long-term downtime, we upgraded the entire system. The nice thing about that is it puts us in a position where our hopeful future upgrades and safety measures can be easily factored into the control system."

With the coaster in solid condition, the brief winter closure allowed the facility to address other types of concerns.

"Along with normal track maintenance, we've spent a lot of time on a whole new gate system and because of that, we took the time to take the old wood platform up and put all new wood down," Bigger said. "It's definitely a facelift and the gates function better with the new control system."

The Gravity Group



In the winter months, the park worked with **The Gravity Group** to replace the queue gates, as well as installing an entirely new loading station platform. AT/TIM BALDWIN



The new wheel from Mel Park offers numerous light packages, an attribute that excites **Kemah Boardwalk** (above). **Flame**, a **Larson Ring of Fire**, received a refurbishment and a total new loop structure (below). AT/TIM BALDWIN; COURTESY KEMAH BOARDWALK

supplied the gates and was also the designer of the ride. **Martin & Vlemminckx** constructed the ride in 2007. The ride's 92-foot first drop reaches a speed of 51 mph. The Gravity Group is the lead engineer for refurbishment, and **Kemah Boardwalk** also partners with **Axiom** for track maintenance.

Two **Larson International** rides also received a winter refresh. Owing to age and the seaside weather conditions, the Boardwalk opted to purchase an entirely new Drop Zone drop tower.

"At the point we were at, we determined we needed a new carriage," Bigger told AT. "With the investment we were going to put into it, we decided to go with a whole new ride. It will have a new lighting system and a new paint job. It'll be a nice addition when we get it installed. It had been a reliable ride, but with 15 years of constant



salt spray on it, it was due for a replacement."

The **Larson** loop attraction also saw refurbishment, including the entire ring structure.

"We kept the hydraulics, electronics and train," said Bigger. "But we got a whole new structure."

One of the Boardwalk's biggest successes has been found in keeping things

looking fresh.

"One thing we are doing new with **Larson** is how we paint things," Bigger said. "We discussed paint with them at **IAAPA Expo**. When they paint a ride, we now want a clear coat [on top]. It's kind of standard practice in the industry to paint a ride and put stickers on it.

► See **KEMAH**, page 47



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►KEMAH

Continued from page 46

We found we get a lot more life out of our paint when we put an automotive clear coat over it. It also helps with the stickers; they're not peeling off. It also helps with the fading and sun."

This breakthrough has proven beneficial for Kemah Boardwalk.

"We try to hold a very high standard to how things look," Bigger furthered. "We paint things regularly so they look like new all the time. One of the bigger challenges we had were the cars, because people were always putting their hands on them. The oils on their hands created smudges; maintenance guys have grease on their hands. These things were causing the high touch-points to wear down sooner. We put a clear coat on all our cars on the Hypnospin (Larson Tilt-A-Whirl), and cleaning them is a lot easier and they are more resistant to UV rays. We haven't replaced the stickers since we've put on that clear coat. It's been multiple years."

An additional new attraction was a new Ferris wheel from Mel Park. Biggers is excited about how the light package works differently than the version the park previously had. Each gondola has lights in the top. Because the seats have a translucent quality, the light shines through them, creating a uniquely festive look for an observation wheel.

"Lights come from the canopy, but obviously around the hub too," said Bigger. "Before, our wheel just had static lighting. We converted incandescent bulbs to LED bulbs, but we couldn't do any type of light show. Now we have something with a nice bright show, and it's changing and great. The gondola lights take it to another level."

Located 30 miles south of Houston, the Boardwalk is open daily. Among its various restaurants and shops, the interspersed rides bring color and laughter to the property. Rides can be purchased individually or a wristband for an all-you-can-ride experience.

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Give Kids The World, Baynum collaborate on refreshed Life Floor

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

KISSIMMEE, Fla. — Beloved by the amusement industry and even more so by the families they've served, **Give Kids The World Village** is a special place providing memorable vacations to families with children who have critical illnesses. Its message of Happiness Inspires Hope is taken to heart.

While many theme parks in Central Florida welcome families in the **Make a Wish** and **Give Kids The World** programs, there are days when visiting families enjoy relaxing activities right at the Village.

Recently, a collaboration between the Village and **Life Floor** has brought new life to a dated splash play area. Previously, the flooring was finished with Marcite, which is expensive to repair. Its hard surface offered no safety characteristics.

"The difference is night and day!" said **Michael Bausman**, director of facilities and resources, Give Kids The World (GKTW). "The old surface was one neutral color, and, of course, all the patches were always visible. The new flooring is so vibrant and fun and is certainly in line with what we do by providing a fun, unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience."

"GKTW and Life Floor had been in talks since meeting at IAAPA Expo 2019," said **Briana Valente**, Life Floor. "We sketched out some initial options, but they had to put the project on hold because of lack of funds around the 2020 uncertainty. Then in 2023, they reached out again



Above left shows what the play area looked like before the transformation, and the colors and refresh (above right) have brought new life. The splash area (below) helps entertain families that are staying at the Village. COURTESY BAYNUM



because they were considering refinishing the splash pad. They said their contacts at **Universal**, **Disney**, and **Martin Aquatic** had all recommended us because of projects we've completed with them. After touring [area facilities], the GKTW team was impressed by our immersive theming capabilities and accessible features."

Life Floor offers a Matching Funds Grant Program.

"Our sales team member who worked on the project, **MaryAnn Eifert**, has been a Central Florida resident for the last 20+ years," noted Valente. "As such, she's well aware of GKTW and their mission. When she heard about the potential project, she encouraged them to apply. Once we received their application, MaryAnn advocated for GKTW to receive a 100% matching fund grant for tile materials. She spoke to our long-time installer and registered aquatic partner, **Baynum Solutions**, to ask them to offer a dis-

count on labor to support the cause. Having known GKTW for many years through the IAAPA GKTW Golf Tournament, Baynum was enthusiastic about collaborating and offered a significant labor discount."

"The team at Baynum Solutions is passionate about the work we do, our customers, and the role the amusement industry plays in bringing joy to guests," said Baynum Solutions President and CEO, **Walt Bowser**. "Partnering with LifeFloor on the installation of a colorful, comfortable and family-friendly new floor for Give Kids the World's interactive water garden is part of a decades-long commitment to supporting the important work of Give Kids the World. Give Kids the World is a personal passion for me as it has been my great privilege to be part of the IAAPA Give Kids the World charity Golf Tournament for more than 20 years. The amusement industry, and Give Kids the World, can count on Baynum Solutions to support the mission of providing a magical week of simple joys to wish families."

"Give Kids The World is a mission that matters," added Eifert. "This is one of the few organizations I've seen go above and beyond creating opportunities for entire families to make meaningful memories with kids who might not have as long. Because of that mission, I knew Baynum was undoubtedly the right choice to partner with; their values and heart for people are aligned with Life Floor's."



The area is named Jack's Wacky Water Works splash pad.

Life Floor is quick to give credit to GKTW for the design itself. Life Floor made simple adaptations to make it more cost-effective and easier to install.

"Since this facility is a renovation rather than a new build, we specified our Transition Strips for the borders of the installation to provide an ADA accessible, no-trip transition from the surrounding area to the splash pad," noted Valente. "Every single one of our projects is created with accessibility in mind. Sometimes that includes color zoning/visual signals or tactile signals, but those elements depend on the unique requests of a facility. Regardless of the visual design, our products are accessible by nature and promote safety for all kinds of diverse play styles. We believe that flooring is a feature, not just a background element."

"It's so much safer!" Bausman told *Amusement Today*. "In the event we do have to do a repair in the future, it can now be done

with no impact to the families and making certain it is always show-ready!"

"Kids can hop from bubble to bubble, roll along the tentacles using water wheelchairs, relax and sit in low-spray zones supported by our cushioned tiles, or pretend to surf on the surf-board play elements," added Valente. "These elements transport kids to new worlds of imagination that would otherwise be impossible on a blank slab of concrete. It's incredible to see how kids truly play differently on Life Floor. The difference is made possible through boundless free play opportunities."

"While our families' wishes are to visit the parks, we find that so many families truly appreciate the atmosphere they find here in the Village," said Bausman. "They sometimes run into families dealing with similar illnesses or issues like themselves and just being able to share their experiences can often bring a sense of relief. The intimacy the Village provides is an opportunity to play as a family, where the focus can be just on them."



The Baynum team installed the Life Floor product at Give Kids The World Village. COURTESY BAYNUM



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Nominate a safety star in the amusement industry

Honor those who lead with passion, mentorship, and safety

Do you know someone who is dedicated to sharing their knowledge, mentoring others, and advancing safety in the amusement industry? Now's the time to acknowledge their impact by nominating them for the prestigious **AIMS International Safety Award**.

The AIMS International Safety Award is presented to an individual or organization that demonstrates leadership, innovation and foresight in improving safety across the amusement industry. Each year, the award is given at the Golden Ticket Awards — presented by *Amusement Today* — and your nomination could help spotlight someone truly deserving.

Hear from **Patty Beasley**, the 2024 AIMS Safety Award recipient, on what this recognition meant to her:

"Receiving such an award was overwhelming. As an old Southern gal who began working 48 years ago as a parking lot attendant at the now-defunct **Opryland U.S.A.** in Nashville, Tennessee, I had no idea what lay ahead.

"Though I earned a master's degree in counseling psychology and taught at both secondary and post-secondary levels, my love for the amusement industry never waned. I continued working at our local theme park and found true joy in mentoring and teaching young leaders to be the best they can be. Why not do this for the industry I love?

"Since becoming an AIMS member in 2002, I've taken great pride supporting the AIMS mission and serving as the Education Chairperson from 2007 to 2014. My goal was to elevate the educational offerings — especially in operations, but also by adding aquatics, upgrading content for carnivals and traveling shows, and recruiting top instructors in every specialty, from electrical maintenance to risk management.

"Education knows no boundaries and knowledge is power. Why not share what we've learned with those rising in the ranks?

"As a managing member and owner of **International Ride Training**, my business partners and I work every day to make our industry

safer. I'm passionate about seeing young leaders grow. Many of those we've taught over the years are now directors, general managers and even park presidents. It all starts with the fundamentals of ride safety, and understanding the whys behind what we do is essential.

"I'm not out to pasture yet — there's still more work ahead! However, receiving the AIMS International Safety Award confirms that I'm on the right path. It is the honor of a lifetime, and one I'll cherish forever."

Looking ahead, Beasley is already preparing a stellar lineup of courses and presenters for the Operations Track at the **2026 AIMS International Safety Seminar**. Her story is a powerful reminder that safety leadership can create lasting change.

Know someone like Patty Beasley? Nominate them today!

Visit aimsintl.org/about/awards to complete the nomination form. Let's celebrate the people who are shaping a safer, stronger amusement industry.

Space for this AIMS page is provided courtesy of *Amusement Today* as a corporate partner of AIMS Intl. Content is provided by AT & AIMS.



SAFETY AWARD NOMINATIONS NOW BEING ACCEPTED

The AIMS International Safety Award is presented annually to the individual or organization that demonstrates leadership, innovation, and foresight in improving safety in the amusement industry.

Nominations for the AIMS International Safety Award can be easily submitted via the button below. The nominee's name, contact information, and a short description of why the nominee deserves to be recognized is all you need.

The award will be presented during the Golden Ticket Awards in September 2025.

**The nomination deadline is
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Patty Beasley Awarded 2024 Safety Award;
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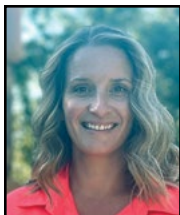


In-service planning should be a priority during busy summer season

AT: Susan Storey
Special to Amusement Today

ORLANDO — No matter how long a lifeguard has been guarding a pool, lagoon or water park, their number one focus remains the same: the safety of their guests and teams around them. Continued education and training go hand and hand, and as part of its service with clients around the world, Ellis & Associates (E&A) encourages operators to include ongoing education and in-service training for everyone on the team.

"In our industry, safety is not just a top priority, it's a responsibility," said **Sarhece Serna**, client manager, Ellis & Associates. "That's why planning for continuing education and in-service sessions is critically necessary. It empowers us to prevent risks, adapt to change and keep patrons safe. Now is the time to plan."



Serna

"Most of us become less proficient when we don't refresh our skills and review previously learned content," Serna continued. "Using in-service training to regularly practice the physical skills necessary to perform in the heat of the moment leads to better outcomes for everyone."

E&A understands that with all the responsibilities that come with opening and operating a park, it can be hard for operators to carve out the time to pre-plan ongoing education and in-service training experiences for lifeguards. To help, E&A's education department has a thorough library of critical resources to make planning, delivering and tracking in-service easier than ever before.

According to Serna these tips and tools can work for any team and include ideas that can be customized to support locations from community pools to water parks to expansive lagoon resorts.



In-service training does not happen spontaneously. Ellis & Associates encourages facilities to preplan and schedule their in-service sessions early in the operating season.
COURTESY ELLIS & ASSOCIATES

To start, managers should think about their in-service training before their season gets into full swing.

"Don't wait until you are deep into operation," Serna shared. "Take the time to plan. Begin with a list of important topics for your team. Create a plan for ongoing training throughout the season and assign a responsible member of your team to help oversee it. Communicate regularly and remind everyone that continuing education is part of the job."

While E&A's focus is on aquatics safety, in-service training is important and beneficial to every other department at the park or facility.

"Even departments such as food service or maintenance benefit from continued in-service training," Serna continued. "In-service should also include general topics that are critical to every department. As you are planning your sessions, you may notice there is more crossover from department to department than you first realized."

Topics such as safe lifting, slip and fall prevention, heat-related incident prevention and more are great examples that can be covered and reviewed across other teams and disciplines.

Certified lifeguards need to complete regular in-service training to maintain test-ready skill proficiency. E&A encourages operators to remember to include topics such as Scanning and Recognition, In-Water Care for an Unresponsive Guest,

Spinal Motion Restriction and Team Back Boarding and Extrication, and First Aid Response as part of their aquatics team in-service program.

"Scheduling in-service is just as important as the regular shift schedule," Serna pointed out. "Plan priority topics and put them on the calendar now. Publish and share what, when, where and why the in-service will take place. Communicate early and remind often."

This seemingly simple step helps department heads stay organized but also supports supervisors as they schedule guard shifts throughout the season. It also helps trainers plan their schedules with the park's calendar and peak times.

"It's important to remember to offer the same topic multiple times, across varying shift schedules," Serna added. "Planning make-up days will also help ensure everyone on the team can take part."

Technology is an operator's best friend — and that includes the aquatics area. A learning management system (LMS) can provide training resources directly to the team, help track individual completion progress, manage class rosters and document training. In addition, utilizing a simple text/SMS system is an easy way to remind everyone when and where the upcoming training will take place.

The adage, "If a tree falls in a forest and no one heard



it, did it make a sound?" applies to in-service training. If management does not track attendance and participation, the training did not happen.

"Remember, whether you use a learning management system, a Google sheets or another program, recording and verifying attendance is a critical part of any in-service program," Serna said. "And don't forget to track those instances when attendee signatures are also required."

Technology can also improve the consistency and effectiveness of any training.

"eLearning resources can be utilized and applied to supplement in-person training," added **Joe Stefanyak**,



Stefanyak

vice president of education, Ellis & Associates. "eLearning can maximize training by combining instructional content with videos and quizzing. This helps break up the traditional training style and works well for teams with varying age groups and individual learning styles."

Stefanyak points to E&A's "Build Your Own" LMS from Pectora as one way E&A helps clients deliver ongoing training easier than ever. Designed to simplify continuous education, the

Pectora LMS accommodates client-provided content, features off-the-shelf training courses including over 35 pre-built micro-lessons, and has a variety of one-hour e-learning sessions. Pectora also offers industrywide access to a range of education titles, stretching beyond E&A's educational content and the aquatics industry.

"The benefits with Pectora are endless," Stefanyak added. "Pectora facilities can accomplish classroom training up front, even before their teams come on site. This is one way to help ensure team members are prepared in advance, and it saves valuable instructor time by eliminating the need to teach the same course multiple times."

Beyond assisting with early season training, E&A's Pectora also makes professional development and continued education easy and accessible. Users can conveniently complete online courses and earn needed IACET accredited CEUs for required and other recognized certifications.

"Safety and training go hand and hand," finished Stefanyak. "The continuous cycle of in-service training, coupled with ongoing education through eLearning, can help ensure aquatics teams are prepared and ready for anything."

Revamped Mind Eraser opens with new trains at Darien Lake

AT: Pam Sherborne
psherborne@amusementtoday.com

CORFU, N.Y. — The 2025 opening day has come and gone at **Six Flags Darien Lake**, but guests, most likely, will remember their first ride on the newly revamped Mind Eraser roller coaster.

The park opened this year on May 17. The **Vekoma** coaster received two brand new trains, seat belts, new paint and newly profiled track. The coaster, which began operating in 1997, is the only suspended looping coaster (SLC) in the State of New York.

Park President **Chris Thorpe** said that on opening day, a group of coaster enthusiasts went for a ride.

"They stated to the park's operations director that based on what they rode, they feel like we have the best suspended looping coaster in the country. That was very high praise. Other guests that I talked to during the day really loved it," he said.

Thorpe said to prepare for the coaster's revamp, they performed a series of



Vekoma supplied new trains and restraints for Mind Eraser (above left). This latest design of suspended seats (above right) creates an improved and completely different ride experience.
COURTESY SIX FLAGS

evaluations throughout the entire ride experience, along with 3-D measurements of the entire track.

"The 3-D measurement allowed us to determine opportunities for perfection in the track ties," he said. "We also used a 3-D laser tracker to coordinate the center line of the rail pipes. For the track improvements at a certain spot, ties were cut at the left and/or right side. Rails were re-aligned in such a way that, first, the banking course was corrected. The ties were then welded again, and the track gauge was applied to review

optimal performance along with another 3-D review."

Although no section of the track was replaced, the park ended up making roughly 15 improvements to the ties where they were cut and welded and approximately 30 other ties were adjusted by means of heating and other methodologies.

Vekoma is the supplier of the new trains and restraints. Thorpe said this is the latest Vekoma design of suspended seats, which creates a completely improved and different ride experience.

The latest design of suspended seats is equipped with a hydraulic locking system. It is more maintenance-friendly than the current ratchet system of the SLC.

Thorpe said that because of the quick response of the hydraulic cylinders, the system also reduces the load and unload time, which means capacity increases of the ride; more guests will be able to enjoy the SLC.

"This latest design of suspended seat has many advantages," Thorpe said. "The new shoulder vests are self-adjusting and also very

stable to lateral forces. You now have 360-degree vision as your head is no longer within the confines of the old restraints."

The new vest rests comfortably on the riders' shoulders, who are basically free-flying.

"This modern-design seat brings the guest a completely new ride experience," Thorpe said. "It offers an unobstructed view with a lot of freedom to move, combined with a very safe and comfortable enclosure."

Every inch of track and column was freshly painted, restoring the ride to its original vibrant teal and red colors.

"We painted the ride in roughly one month and installed the new train/suspended seats ready for opening day," Thorpe said. "The project took roughly one full year to complete."

He noted, "We are incredibly thrilled with the response we are getting from our guests and are so pleased with the rebirth of one of our signature attractions. It is going to be a fantastic season."

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Great Coasters International smooths nine coasters with Titan Track

AT: Tim Baldwin
tbaldwin@amusementtoday.com

SUNBURY, Pa. — Since introducing Titan Track in November of 2019, **Great Coasters International, Inc.** (GCII) has found solid success in assisting parks with rough areas on its wooden coasters. In today's marketplace, there are various solutions to high-maintenance spots on the wooden track bed, and Titan Track is one finding favor as a long-term steel solution for many parks.

In this past off-season, GCII has installed Titan Track on nine different coasters. Two of them were in Europe: Wodan at **Europa-Park** and Stampida at **PortAventura Park**.

"This is our second time to work on Wodan," said **Clair Hain**, owner, GCII. "This year, we worked on the section from the station to the lift. It had never been retracked. It turned out really well."

While not a high-speed area on the coaster, the whimsical banking and outward forces caused



Dutch Wonderland replaced the approach to the lift hill from the station on **Kingdom Coaster** (above). The combined total of length on the twin tracks of **Stampida** was 648 feet (right). COURTESY GCII

some stress, which the new steel track resolved.

"Europa-Park's ride is so fast, the first time we were there was to do the brake run. It was hitting the brakes with such speed, the braking was causing sags in the track," Hain told *Amusement Today*. "We suggested doing Titan Track in that spot, and now they have come back a second time. They love it."

When asked which project of the nine was

the largest, Hain noted it was the ride in Spain, as both tracks on the racing woodie, **Stampida**, received new track.

"We did almost 325 feet on each side," he said.

With nine projects, it's obvious that they can't all happen at the same time.

"We started right before Christmas," Hain recalled. "We were working seven days a week, up to 12 hours a day to make the schedules of what the parks wanted. A lot of the parks didn't [make the decision] until late in the season. It was difficult to go in and get the elevations we needed, design it and then manufacture it."



All projects were completed by mid-May.

Titan Track projects in the United States include **Michigan's Adventure**, **Six Flags St. Louis**, **Worlds of Fun**, **Lake Compounce**, **Darien Lake** and **Dutch Wonderland**. In addition to the Titan Track projects, GCII was also busy repairing track with both pine and ipe wood at vari-

ous parks. Replacing running rails, installing new queue gates, lift repair and enclosing the lift on **Worlds of Fun's Zambezi Zinger** were other services accomplished in the off-season.

Interestingly, **Dollywood** installed a new style of Titan Track, but it wasn't on its wooden coast-

► See TITAN, page 53

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Titan Track was installed on **Lake Compounce's Boulder Dash** for a third year in a row. COURTESY GCII

►TITAN

Continued from page 52

er. The park installed a special version with smaller scale on its indoor coaster-like dark ride, Blazing Fury.

"Rocky Mountain [Construction] did some work a couple of years ago, and they hired us this year to do a different section," Hain told AT. "Our Titan Track is completely different than what they had. The ride also has a center trough for guides, and we installed that. It was a pretty big job."

Hain indicated that the park may wish to further the project in the future. Blazing Fury opened in 1978.

Titan Track is weld free; it is a full rivet-based system.

Confidence in the prod-

uct is seen by the repeat customers. Darien Lake, Michigan's Adventure, Europa-Park and Lake Compounce have returned to GCII for more sections to be smoothed out.

"We have returned for a third year of Titan Track on Boulder Dash," said **Jerry Brick**, director of construction and maintenance, **Palace Entertainment**. "Our goal was to reduce downtime, and when the track needs work on the upper side, everything is hand carried up the mountain and that takes a bit of time to do. The coaster is so fast, it requires work even during the summer and we were concerned about the downtime, so we researched and worked with the team at

Great Coasters. The areas we have done are smooth, and it has helped us tremendously on lowering the downtime due to track issues."

While the steel solution is designed to treat rough areas on a wood coaster that need frequent retracking, the capabilities of the track system include inversions and launches as well.

While GCII is known for producing its own trains, the track system can also be retrofitted to work with trains the customer has on its existing ride.

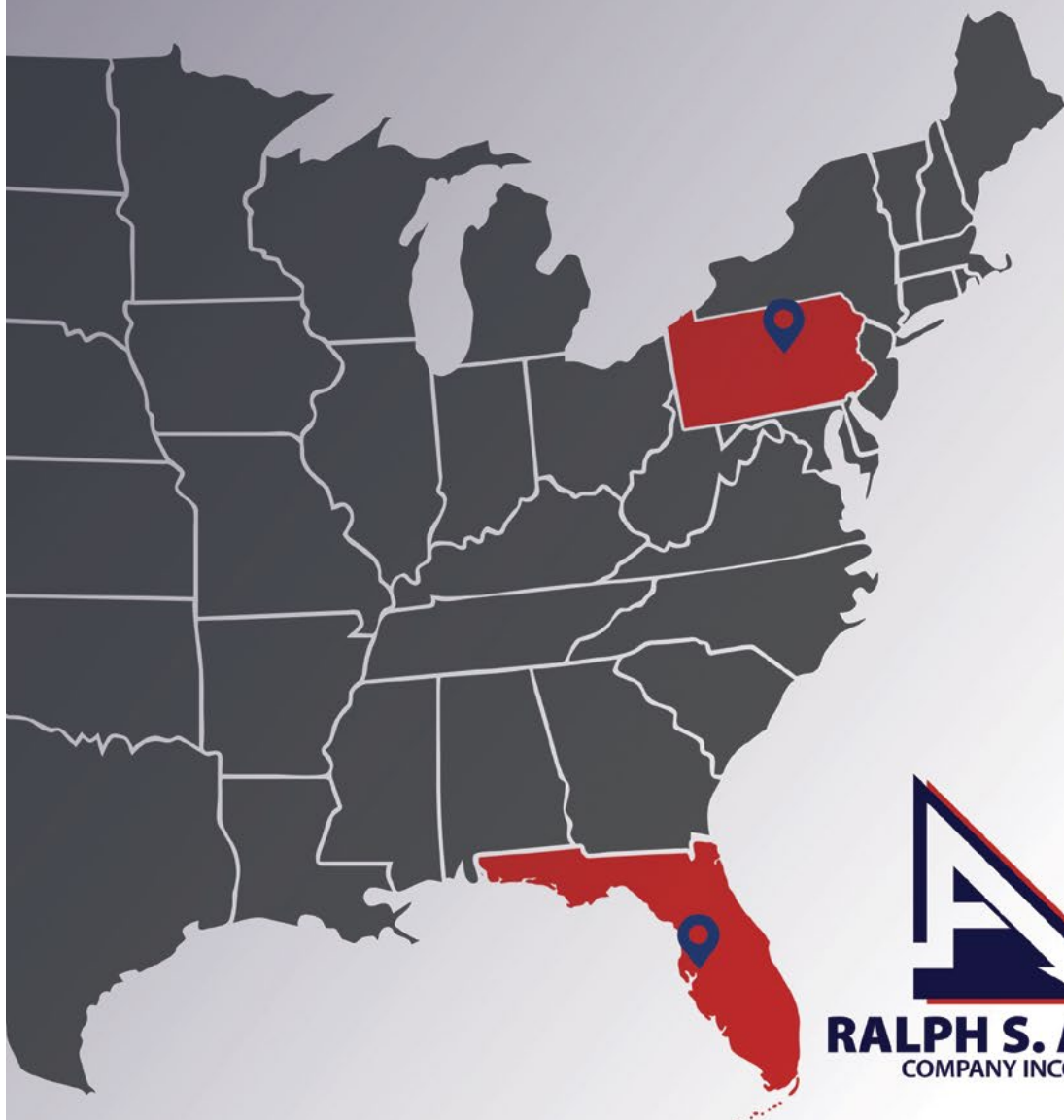
•greatcoasters.com

Six Flags Darien Lake is a repeat customer for enhancing the smoothness on Predator.
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